

“Jesus Is Calling”

Exodus 3:1-12 & Matthew 4:18-23

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Exodus 3:1-12 NLT “One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. “This is amazing,” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go see it.” When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied. “Do not come any closer,” the Lord warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?” God answered, “I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.”

Matthew 4:18-23 NLT “One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed Jesus. A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed Jesus, leaving the boat and their father behind. Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And Jesus healed every kind of disease and illness.”

Jesus is calling you. Everyone is being called by God. Some are not listening and never hear the call. Others begin to hear Jesus calling and ignore it by turning up the distractions, the noise of life. Others hear the call and shrink from it through a variety of excuses or a feeling of unworthiness. Some embrace the call.

James Fenhagen writes, “Every Christian has (a call) a vocation. We are called to share in the ministry of Jesus in and through the world. In the Sacrament of Baptism this call is incarnated, giving us both a clear identity in the world and a sense of purpose about what our lives are ultimately for. Sharing in the ministry of Jesus involves living in the world as an expression of the holiness we see in Jesus—a holiness expressed through his compassion, his concern for justice (righteousness) and through his healing and reconciling presence in the world. The relationship Jesus offers to us results in those qualities we see in Jesus being expressed through us, sometimes even despite ourselves. We cannot, therefore, limit this expression to a particular profession or a particular role or a particular job.”

Carlo Carretto writes, “Whether you are on the sand worshipping or at the teacher’s desk, what does it matter as long as you are doing the will of God? And if the will of God urges you to seek out the poor, to give up all your possessions, or to leave for distant lands, what does the rest matter? Or if God calls you to lovingly found a family or take on a job in a city, why should you have any doubts? God’s will is our peace!”

My favorite explanation of call comes from Pastor Frederick Buechner who said, “Call or one’s vocation is where the world’s greatest need and a person’s greatest joy meet.”

This morning we have heard two call stories from scripture; the call of Moses and the call of Peter, Andrew, James and John. The Bible is full of call stories of all shapes and sizes reiterating that God has a specific and general, universal call for each of us.

Moses' call follows the usual call pattern. God first does something radical in a person's life to grab their attention. After hearing God's call, the person tries to get out of it with excuses, saying they are inadequate. Surely someone else is more qualified for I am too old, too young, too weak, too busy. I have a family, lack experience, don't know what to do, this call is too big, and the ever popular I have other plans right now God. God listens, let's the person vent and go through their list of excuses, then God lovingly replies, I will be with you. God's call is always a partnership between you and God. Often God only gives you the details of your call as you go, revealing just what you need for the moment. God is persistent. You may reject God's call, but God will patiently keep calling until you will join God in following God's plan for your life. Sometimes the call is specific with one option; other calls give a person a variety of options, a variety of ways to be faithful.

Moses was given a very specific call to bring the Israelites out of slavery from the Egyptians. Moses already tried to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but no one would listen to him and he became frustrated and angry which led to Moses murdering an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. This caused him to flee Egypt and be a shepherd walking by the burning bush. Now God is calling Moses to try to do again what he failed to do in the prime of his life. God's timing can be frustrating. Many of us are like Moses wanting fast results, struggling to wait for God's timing.

Moses had a specific call, with a clearly defined objective. Moses knew the situation and what it entailed. That's why Moses said, "But who I am that I should go". God answered, "I will be with you." Then Moses protested and gave numerous excuses before God persuaded him to accept his calling. If you find yourself debating your call with God, remember God is a patient, persistent, an excellent debater and God has probably heard every conceivable excuse by now.

Along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was speaking a general, universal call for the disciples and each of us. Calling, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Their response is perplexing. "Immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus." A little further down the lakeshore Jesus calls James and John, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." "Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus." What was it about Jesus that a one sentence call inspired them to immediately leave everything and follow him? We know it wasn't his physical appearance. It is doubtful that Jesus had white skin, blue eyes and long flowing well-styled hair. Philip Yancy suggests maybe Jesus was short, pudgy, and bald. We know Jesus' physical appearance was not important. If it was, then there would be a physical description of Jesus in the Bible. Throughout the entire Bible there is not a single description of a physical trait of Jesus.

Perhaps it was the aura of Jesus' voice. Scripture says, "they were amazed at Jesus' teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law." Also, unlike the teachers of that day, Jesus did not wait for people to come to him. He went out to the people, all people, lived with them, taught them, and called them. Context suggests that something much deeper was happening in their hearts. What happens in the heart is difficult to explain, so symbolism is used. Matthew 4:16 states, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the shadow of death light has dawned."

Jesus echoed the short sermon of John the Baptist, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." Jesus brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth just as we do when we follow Jesus' example of extravagant love. The Kingdom of Heaven is partially here today, yet it will not be complete until God's redeeming power is fully manifested in every person and the entire world.

John Calvin said, "The first thing that strikes us here is the power of Christ's voice. Not that his voice alone makes so powerful an impression on the hearts of people: but (also they)...are inwardly addressed by God's Spirit, that they may obey Jesus' voice. The second is ready obedience of his disciples, who prefer the call of Christ to all worldly affairs...to devote themselves unreservedly to Jesus and Christ's church." Eugene Boring writes, "We are met here with Jesus' first miracle, the miracle of his powerful word that creates following, that makes disciples."

Jesus calls us all to follow him and be fishers of people. This is reflected in our vision statement Know Christ, Show Christ. We are to Know Christ by following Jesus and fish for people by Showing Christ to those around us. Jesus calls us all to repent, to turn from a self-centered life to a God-centered life, to turn from following worldly voices to Jesus' voice, to turn from self-control to giving God control of our life. We need to

turn from getting our identity from secular sources such as a career, family, status, or achievements and discover our true identity in Jesus – an identity that derives our value from being a beloved child of God and sees all people as beloved children of God, our brothers, and sisters. As we follow Jesus, we discover who we truly are and realize we are called to restore all relationships with forgiveness and love until the entire world is healed, whole and brought together as one loving community.

The disciples had no idea what they were getting into. They had no idea of the places Jesus would lead them, the adventures they would endure and celebrate, or the specific calls that each of them would discover along the way. The disciples faltered repeatedly in their attempts to follow Jesus. God is patient and keeps calling, teaching, nurturing and enabling us to fulfill our calling. The disciples left their nets, their boats, and their careers behind. James and John even left their father behind to follow Jesus. Jesus does not call everyone to leave everything behind—but nobody can be a disciple without leaving something behind. What have you had to leave behind—or let go of—to follow Jesus? Do you feel that Jesus might be asking you to move further—and what would that mean leaving?

Each of our calls evolve, develop, and grow over the years. We are all called to follow Jesus, to strive to live, forgive, heal and love like Jesus. We are all called to draw people to the light and love of a relationship with God. Along the way God has specific calls for us. God's specific call comes in many ways often through other people like a calling to serve with Hands-On Mission; a child calling you to play a game; a friend calling for a compassionate person; the nominating committee calling you to serve as an elder or deacon; a teenager who is rebelling but is really calling for your love, support and structure; an organization that is calling for your help to make the world better; a spouse who is calling you to listen; a society that is calling you to be productive, serving and sharing of your gifts and on and on. All of us receive calls from God on multiple levels for every dimension of life; calls for career, self, family, community and church. Oliver Wendell writes, "We, by answering Jesus' call, will never be the same again. A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimension."

All of us are called. We all share the universal call to follow Jesus and fish for people and each of us also has specific calls. Every call is equally important there is no hierarchy. The emblem of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. is a constant reminder for it has flames symbolize that all are called by God. These flames remind us of Moses' specific calling at the burning bush. These flames remind us of everyone's calling celebrated at Pentecost. These flames remind us that we are filled with the hot, fiery, light of the Holy Spirit and are called to be messengers of the good news of God's love. When we shrink from our calling there is a void, a darkness, an absence of love in our lives, the church, the community and the world. When we embrace our call, we experience inner peace even though we may be in the midst of a storm, because God is with us, giving us all we need to fulfill our calling.

Jesus is calling. Are you striving to imitate Jesus' life? Are you fishing for people, attracting others with the magnetic light of God's work in your life? Have you repented and discovered your true identity in God? Have you left your net, the stuff getting in the way of your calling, behind to follow Jesus whole heartedly? Jesus is calling, are you listening for your specific call? Are you eager to say yes and follow? Are you bringing the Kingdom of Heaven into your life and those around you? Are you shining with God's light causing dawn to break upon those wandering in darkness? Amen