1/25-26/20 Calling Ordinary People Rev. Amy Haines

Matthew 4:12-23

(Name) and (Name)—will you please get up and follow me? Are you ready to fish for people?

What does that mean? Share with them the good news of God. Love others as God loves you.

Show them the ways of God. Are you ready to fish for people? Please go and tell someone else in this room that God loves them. Then you may be seated. Thank you.

Those I chose--did you trust me? But you know me. In knowing me, you were reluctantly willing to follow me.

Imagine if some traveling preacher were to walk through the back doors of our church today,

and call you to follow him, and fish for people. Would you do it? Or in this day and age,

would you need to see his credentials, and do a google check, and make sure he was legit?

Would you allow your family members or close friends to follow, not knowing who he was and what he was about? Or would you try to convince them not to follow some stranger into ministry?

I have always been fascinated by the Gospel stories describing Jesus’ calling of his first disciples.

Today we have heard Matthew’s version of this scene beside the sea.

**“**As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” Right away, they left their nets and followed him. Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” (18-22 CEB)

Matthew doesn’t say if Jesus had a previous relationship with these two sets of brothers. Matthew doesn’t say if Jesus was already known for his astonishing teaching. All Matthew tells us is that Jesus called, and the brothers followed. Immediately. They left their nets, their boats, even their family members behind.

That word immediately has always captured my attention. What made the disciples immediately leave all behind to follow Jesus? Most likely, Jesus was not yet well known.

He had barely started his ministry. No one knew what miracles he would perform, nor that he would sacrifice himself on the cross and three days later rise from the dead. No one knew what challenges his disciples would face, nor what type of ministry they would be called to do. Jesus did not have a handout with a detailed job description on what dangers and joys the life of a disciple would entail. Jesus did not offer his first disciples the deal of a lifetime or appeal to their sense of duty or morality. He also did not give them a time frame or a destination

or an option to leave if they were not satisfied.

Instead, Jesus called. And they followed. Immediately.

I often wonder if they followed because Jesus’ call was so unexpected.

In the Jewish culture at the time, the most revered position was that of a rabbi. A Rabbi was an authority on the Scriptures, and each Rabbi had their own interpretations of the Scriptures

that they then taught to others. Most rabbis had their own disciples, their own students,

who learned that Rabbi’s interpretations in order to pass them on to others. These disciples, these students, were often the brightest and best of the young Jewish men who had been learning and memorizing the Scriptures since age 6. The Jewish education system was built on making disciples from the brightest and the best, and everyone else by the age of 14 were sent home to learn the trade of their fathers. If at age 14 a young Jewish man heard the words, “Come, follow me,” they then left everything behind to go follow, learn from and imitate the Rabbi who chose them to be a disciple.

--adapted from Ty Tamasaka “Restoring a Passion for the Christ” May 2011 sermoncentral.com

Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi, and at age 30, was just beginning his ministry like most normal rabbis.

Only Jesus did not seek out the brightest and the best. He did not invite the most educated or from the best families. Jesus did not call only young men he could groom to follow him.

Instead, Jesus sought out hard working fishermen who had already been told by the Jewish education system, go home and learn a trade. Instead, he called older men who were settled with families and livelihoods, calling them to leave it all behind.

Jesus called unlikely disciples.

He also called them from an unexpected place.

Most rabbis found their disciples in the great city of Jerusalem.

Yet when Jesus heard the news that John had been arrested, Jesus immediately fled back to the Galilee region. However, instead of returning to Nazareth, Jesus journeyed to Capernaum along the Galilean Sea.

Capernaum was an ordinary village comprised of ordinary farmers and fishermen. Capernaum was located in the region that used to hold the Jewish tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, before those tribes were removed by the Assyrian invasion. It was a land that felt forgotten. It was a land that felt forlorn. It was a land oppressed by Rome’s puppet, a brutal leader called Herod Antipas. Taxes were high and moral was low. Many faithful Jews resigned themselves to the darkness and struggles of life.

Yet there is where Jesus began his ministry. There is where Jesus began to shine God’s light into the darkness. There is where Jesus began to offer hope and declare God’s news. And there is where Jesus chose his first disciples.

They were not the first, nor were they the last, called by God at an unexpected time in an unexpected place.

..Rebekah (17th century B.C.) was drawing water at the city well at Nahor.

Amos (8th century B.C.) was picking fruit in the fields of Tekoa.

Paul (1st century A.D.) was traveling on the road to Damascus.

Lydia (1st century A.D.) was selling prized purple cloth in Thyatira.

Augustine (354-430) was out working in the garden.

John Wesley (1703-1791) was listening to a lay person read the Scriptures.

John Locke (1632-1704) was a private secretary.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) was a bank clerk.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was riding in the side car of his brother's bike.

Helen Joseph (1905-1992 ) was serving time in jail.

-“Returning God’s Call” 1-20-91 homileticsonline.com adapted

Throughout history, God has called and continues to call ordinary men and women to do extraordinary things in their lives to proclaim the good news of God.

Jesus began his ministry in an ordinary village with four ordinary fishermen, two sets of brothers named Simon and Andrew, James and John. In choosing ordinary men, Jesus continued the good news declared at his birth by shepherds and magi. The kingdom of heaven was good news for all people from all backgrounds.

God’s love and grace, God’s forgiveness and calling was not just for the elite in Jerusalem,

not just for the learned and wealthy, not just for the pure families of Israel. No, God’s good news is for all people. Jesus came as the gift of God-with-us for all humanity. Then and now.

Today, do we recognize that the calling of Jesus long ago is still a calling to us here in this room?

Look around you—we are ordinary people living ordinary lives. We are varied in our ages and in our experiences. We are at different places in our faith journeys, from skeptic to trusting. Yet today, Jesus calls each and every one of us.

Jesus says to each one of us,

“Come and follow me.” “Come and be my disciple.” “Learn from me and live for me.”

When Jesus invites us to follow him, we are not being asked to have all the answers. We are not being asked to have a life of faith perfected. We are not being asked to remove all doubts from our minds. And we are not being asked to be lone rangers in ministry.

There were days when these four brothers, as well as the rest of Jesus’ disciples, clearly understood the good news of God for all humanity. There were also days when they strongly misunderstood God’s ways are not often our ways, as they were caught up in their own selfishness or caught up in their tradition that limited who received the good news of God.

There will be times when we want to limit God’s grace to only certain people, when God calls us to care for all. There will be times when we rejoice in God’s blessings, and times when we want to give up dealing with God’s people.

We are not perfect. Thankfully, we don’t need to be perfect to be a follower of Jesus. Instead, we need to be willing to follow Jesus, willing to learn from him, willing to live his ways as our ways.

My brother-in-law co-owns his family’s heating and air conditioning business. He did not learn the business from reading books and watching YouTube videos, for they weren’t yet in existence. No, he learned the family trade by becoming an apprentice, following a skilled technician around and learning from him how to care for HVAC systems. Then he became an employee of his father’s company, living out what he had learned. And he continues to learn today as systems change.

My grandmother learned how to quilt by watching her mother quilt, following her around as they kept scraps of cloth, often from clothes ripped or outgrown. She learned from her mother to put various patterns together, the proper stitch for each pattern, and how to finish the backing so that the quilt would last.

I learned how to follow Jesus first by observing the ways of my extended family. How they made church and prayer and study priorities. How they cared for stranger and friend and family. How following Jesus was foundational for their everyday lives.

When Jesus first invites us to follow him, we don’t have to know the first thing about God’s ways, or God’s word or God’s will. We simply have to be willing to learn, then willing to live by what we learn.

We have to be willing first and foremost to claim who and whose we are. We are God’s beloved sons and daughters, and God delights in us. We heard those words of affirmation two weeks ago, reminding us that God’s love is not bound up in what we do, but rather in who we are.

Next, we are called to respond to God’s love with our love.

Then, as we grow in love with God, we learn more of God’s ways of love and forgiveness, of grace and hope, of compassion and justice. And as we learn more of God’s ways, we learn to live by God’s ways in our lives. To become more grace-filled and forgiving, to care more for the least and the lost, to reflect more of God’s love through our love for others.

Following Jesus is more than intellectual assent. When Jesus calls us to follow him, he is calling us to deeper relationships with God, with one another, and with the world around us. When Jesus calls us to follow him, he is calling us to believe in him then follow his ways.

Jesus called to fishermen,

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

..The carpenter's invitation reads,

"Follow me and I will make you build people."

The accountant will hear it this call as,

"Follow me and I will make you help people know they count."

The waitress will hear,

"Follow me and I will make you serve the spiritual hunger of people."

The physician will hear,

"Follow me and I will make you a healer of people's souls."

A beleaguered mom's call is,

"Follow me and I will make you a builder of children."

A lonely widow’s call is,

“Follow me and I will make you a friend to the lonely.”

--John Jewell “Discovering What We Were Meant To Do”

lectionarysermons.com 1-24-99, adapted

We are all called to follow Jesus. Yet the ways we live out our discipleship will be as diverse as our individual lives.

For some people, God’s calling will be to set-apart ministry as a licensed or ordained pastor.

For other people, that calling will be to the mission field abroad or to a non-profit ministry closer to home. Some of you have been called to assist at the food pantries while others have been called to be reading tutors while others have been called to be Stephen Ministers.

For some people, that calling will include being a witness to Christian ethics at work or being a witness to responsible parenting at home. Work or home are often two of the hardest places

to follow God’s call and stand firm in faith.

For other people, that calling will include caring for the least and lost through speaking out against systems of injustice by means of rallies and letters, calls and prayers.

For some people, that calling will include befriending a neighbor or intentionally calling a friend every day.

For other people, that calling will include caring for children or youth.

God’s call is as varied as our diverse lives. Yet wherever we find ourselves, in whatever situations, Christ calls us to live for him there.

Last year our vision team heard a call to reach out to the growing senior adult population in our community. How is God calling us to minister with and to seniors? How are we called to care for practical safety needs? How can we offer friendship to those who are lonely? How can we minister across generations, and allow our elders to teach us from their vast experience?

We have new families joining our congregation. How can we become extended family for one another? How can we encourage those who have children younger than us that they will survive the terrible twos or the teenage years? How can we minister across generations,

offering love and grace, hope and care to one another regardless of our age or background, struggles or blessings?

We are ordinary disciples. We may not be able to change the world, yet we can impact our area of the world.

So today, believe. Believe you are God’s beloved sons and daughters. Believe that you are forgiven from sin and freed for new life through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Believe that you have a place in the family of God, and you are called to make a difference as a follower of Jesus.

Then live as a follower of Jesus. Live as a disciple of Jesus. Learn God’s ways of welcome and grace and hope, and share those ways in how you interact with one another and how you interact with the world around you.

Jesus says to each one of us,

“Come and follow me.” “Come and be my disciple.” “Learn from me and live for me.”

“Share the good news of God’s kingdom ways.”

In closing today, I want to offer a benediction crafted by Dr. Halverson when he pastored Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland for 23 years. The words are still true for us today, words that remind us Jesus still calls ordinary people like you and I to follow and serve wherever we may find ourselves this day.

Receive his words:

Wherever you go, God is sending you.  
Wherever you are, God has put you there.  
God has a purpose in your being right where you are.  
Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Spirit,  
wants to do something in and through you.  
Believe this and go in his grace, his love, his power.  
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

*-Mark Batterson, The Grave Robber: How Jesus Can Make Your Impossible Possible, Baker Books, 2015. Thepastorsworkshop.com:calling*