

Calling
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Mary Koon
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Matthew 4:18–22

Today we'll be looking at the text of Jesus' call to the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee as recorded by Matthew. It is part of a Biblical tradition of call stories found in the Old and New Testaments. Think of Moses and the burning bush, or God speaking with Abraham or Paul on the road to Damascus. The story of Jesus calling the first disciples is found in all four gospels, letting us know that we need to pay attention to it. Let us pray together for God's fresh wisdom for this familiar story.

Prayer: Startle us, O God, with the truth of your love, your call, your claim upon our lives revealed in scripture this morning. Let these ancient words become living water in our lives, that we, too, might follow where you lead. AMEN

Reading from the Gospel of Matthew, 4th chapter, vss. 18-22:

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. AMEN

In all four gospels, Jesus gathers the first disciples close to the start of his ministry, after he is baptized and led by the spirit into the wilderness

for forty days. In the fourth chapter of Mathew, Jesus learns about John's death and begins preaching where John left off. He takes the message on the road, traveling from Galilee to Nazareth to Capernaum.

In just a few verses, Matthew offers us an picture of Jesus as an itinerant preacher, going from place to place without staying a long time. It is into this challenging, unpredictable new life that he invites the fishermen.

Jesus asks Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their steady paycheck lives, their wives, children, extended family members, and head into the unknown.

Jesus beckons them to follow him just as they are - he doesn't ask them to get an advanced degree first or sign up for a course in discipleship or head to a training site before starting. Discipleship will be on-the-job training with the ultimate teacher. No promises of promotion, career advancement, or benefits. No guarantee of a steady paycheck or even a permanent home.

Follow me, Jesus says.

You may have felt the urgency in this account. Immediately, the gospel tells us, the men throw down their nets, and John and James even leave their poor old dad, sitting in the boat to finish up the mending.

What compelled them to turn to Jesus?

Perhaps word of the teacher had reached the fishermen and they knew something about him. Maybe they were impulsive teens looking for something different. Maybe they felt that sting of working under Roman occupation that took oppressive amounts of their income in taxes and they knew they'd never get ahead, that nothing was going to change. Maybe Jesus was just that convincing and charismatic. We don't know, the scripture doesn't say.

But Jesus wants them to know that he'll make a new kind of fishermen out of them. Fishing for people sounds odd to our ears these days. Surely Jesus wasn't referring to filling pews or building buildings. There was no such thing as the church, and remember that Jesus was Jewish.

Some scholars believe that the term, "fishing for people" refers to a text in the 16th chapter of Jeremiah that concerns the restoration of the nation of Israel after their exile in Babylon. By referring to the image, Matthew reveals Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one. The fulfillment of prophecy, as the gospel so often does.

Yet we remember that Jesus was a genius at meeting people where they were and using words and images that were relevant to them.

By the seaside, Jesus uses familiar language to invite these ordinary workers to a new way of being in the world, one guided by God and deeply grounded in the mission of the flourishing of human life, liberation for all. Jesus invites them to join God's movement of the transformation of humans and their institutions, and not a movement of ideology or ideas. By gathering a group for ministry, Jesus affirms that people are designed to be co-creators, with God, of a world of love and justice. Ministry is a shared endeavor. Everyone has a part to play.

The Presbyterian church believes that all people are called to ministry of various kinds. In each generation, God calls people to new expressions of discipleship. Each of us is uniquely designed to be God's person in the world and to contribute to the common good. Grounded in our identity as God's beloved, paying close attention to God's activity in the world, the spirit energizes us to share and learn and grow.

My six-year-old granddaughter, like many children and adults, is obsessed with the new movie *Encanto*. And for good reason! I bring it up because I find it a beautiful meditation on what it means to be called

and offer oneself in the service of love. The youth at Oak Grove are doing a study on giftedness based on the movie this month.

Encanto is an animated film set in Columbia. The artwork and colors and characters are vibrant and engaging, and the music, by Lin Manuel Miranda (of “Hamilton” and “In the Heights” fame), is evocative. The story is about a family whose individual members possess supernatural gifts that help the community. On a broader level, it is about prophecy and the danger that comes when we turn our backs on the truth.

The protagonist and hero is Mirabel, a 15-year-old who does not receive a supernatural gift like the rest of her family members, and follows her journey to wholeness which is mirrored in the healing of her family and village.

In the end, salvation comes, not from the mobilization of supernatural talents, but from the deeply human gifts of compassion, forgiveness, and courage, all expressed in vulnerability and love. They learn that they are more than just their supernatural gifts. When Mirabel says, “Nothing can ever be broken that we can’t fix together,” I think of Jesus and the disciples, then and now.

The urgency, the immediacy of Jesus’ call reminds us that the time is now, and the way is together. The work of bringing God’s kingdom on earth begins with listening to God, looking and learning where the pain is and then addressing it. Going to the margins and to the halls of power to address the systems that continue to oppress and destroy the earth.

A call is a nudge by the Spirit of God to participate in God’s transformative work in the world. Howard Thurman uses the language of coming alive. Theologian, pastor and author Frederick Beuchner says

that God calls us all to vocation, a place where the world's deep need and your deep gladness meet.¹

We cannot all do everything, but we can all do something.

As we ordain and install our deacons and elders today, we recognize that they are called to particular ministries at a particular time in their lives and the life of our church and world. Ordination – whether for clergy, deacon or elder – does not set one above or over anyone else but sets a person apart for a particular role. The elder's role is one of discernment, governance and discipline, and the deacon's role is one of care and compassion. I pray that as we celebrate and pledge our support to these folks, we will all be inspired to renew our commitment to live into God's call on our lives, whatever that looks like. To be inspired to make God's love visible in the world.

The author Sarah Miles writes, “Jesus calls his disciples, giving us authority to heal and sending us out. He doesn't show us how to make a blind man see, dry every tear, or even drive out all kinds of demons. But he shows us how to enter into a way of life in which the broken and sick pieces are held in love, and given meaning. In which strangers literally touch each other, and in doing so make a community spacious enough for everyone.”²

May it be so. Thanks be to God.

AMEN

¹ <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/7/18/vocation>

² Sara Miles, *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead*, pg. 105 – I originally found this quote in *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Wading on Water and Loving the Bible Again*, by Rachel Held Evans, pg. 188