

Who Jesus Calls

Mark 1:14-20

Rev. Dan Schumacher

One of the things I most enjoy about pastoral ministry is meeting new people who visit our church. Usually, I find those conversations to be quite meaningful, because I know that what people who are searching for a place to worship are really searching for is a chance to meet with God.

But, I also understand that our flavor of church isn't for everyone. If First Lutheran is vanilla ice cream and First Congo is strawberry, maybe we're more like butter pecan — which happens to be my favorite flavor of ice cream. But I get it's not everyone's favorite flavor.

So sometimes my role with those who are looking is to help them understand that if they are hoping for vanilla, we might not be the place for them. It's why I often tell guests that we're a "No secrets, no surprises" kind of place. But that also means that sometimes I end up in fairly uncomfortable conversations with people that I'm meeting for the very first time.

One time, I had a first time guest come down to me right after the benediction and shove a tightly wadded note into my hand, and whisper in my ear, "That's for you for later." I thought it might be an encouraging note or, possibly, a prayer concern. Later, in the solitude of my office, I uncrumpled the tightly wadded piece of paper, and scribbled angrily in all capital letters, underlined multiple times, and with more exclamation points than I care to recount, it said: "PREACH THE BIBLE!!!"

Here I thought I was... but maybe some of you feel that way about my preaching, too.

Another time, an older couple who had served as missionaries for many years with some other organization visited. They sat in Sunday School with the Fellowship Class. They participated in our Fellowship Time. And as I was running around just prior to worship, I happened to bump into them in the stairwell.

"Pastor," he said, "we have thoroughly enjoyed our morning. The people have all been very welcoming and warm. The Sunday school class was challenging and its members seemed quite engaged. I just have one question for you. How can you justify ordaining women?"

Now, I always strive to be both honest and diplomatic in such situations, even if truth be told, I'm a little ticked that someone visiting our church for the first time feels it's their job to correct us. But in my effort to be both honest and diplomatic, I said, "Well, I would be happy to talk about this more with you some other time, but right now I need to get ready for worship. However — I feel I should tell you that if that is an issue that you feel strongly about, then we may not be the church for you, because I don't see us changing our mind on that."

To their great credit they stayed for worship. But that was the last time we saw them...

On another Sunday, we had some guests — a husband and wife. I didn't get to meet them before worship, but after worship they happened to meet Christen, who told them that she was the pastor's wife and offered to introduce them to me.

Christen brought them over and said, "Dan this is so-and-so and so-and-so, and this is their first time visiting with us."

I said, "Oh, Hello," and went through my normal litany of introductory questions. Is this your first time with us? How did you find us? What brings you to us?

Sometimes the answer to that last question can be caustic, especially if they are visiting us because of some displeasure with some other church or some other pastor.

Well, this time, it set off a tirade that went on for about 10 minutes about why they were leaving First United Methodist Church. He talked about the lack of good leadership, the bad theology, and the terrible preaching all of which lay at the feet of Rev. Kent Ingram (who, unbeknownst to him, was my good friend and my fishing buddy).

I looked over at Christen as the tirade continued, her eyes had become as big as saucers. I waited for him to inhale and said, "Well, we are honored that you chose to worship with us today, *but* I think I should let you know that if you have a hard time following Kent's leadership, you'll probably have a hard time following mine, too. We're pretty similar in our theology and our understanding of Jesus."

Now I have a pretty high respect for Kent, but that did not stop me from calling him that afternoon and saying, "Look, man. If you're going to send Methodists my way, at least send me the ones that aren't already looking for a fight!"

The truth is, we all have a little bit of that in us. Whether its related to skin color, gender, age, political persuasion, ethnicity, nationality, who we love, who we cheer for, what part of the country we're from, what kind of vehicle we drive, what part of town we live in, or what kind of job we have, we all carry preconceived notions about the people in this world who aren't just like us.

It's hard to catch it in the english translation of our passage this morning, but when Jesus calls two different sets of brothers in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, he is trying to show us a better way of being in this world.

Jesus comes, first, upon Simon (who we know as Peter) and his brother, Andrew. English translations say, simply, that they were "casting their net into the sea — for they were fishermen" (Mk. 1:16). But in the original Greek, the word used for "casting their net" is the word *amphiballō*. And this is the only place in all of the New Testament where this verb appears, and it refers to casting a very specific kind of net.

It was a circular net with weights all around the edge of the net, and it was attached to a long retrieve rope. To use it you would stand in the water and cast the net out as far as you could. The weights on the net would pull it down, trapping anything under its grasp. You'd pull that net back and see what you had caught. If there was anything worth keeping, you'd trudge your way back to dry land, empty the net into your basket, fold the net for the next cast and march back out to do it all again. Today, we'd call it a cast net, and we would use it to catch bait before going out on a chartered boat to catch bigger fish.

Peter and Andrew did this all day – standing under the blazing sun, the wind and glare off the water burning their faces and eyes, fighting the push and pull of the tide, casting their net and hauling it in, casting their net and hauling it in, casting their net and hauling it in – all day long. This was back-breaking work.

To them, Jesus said, "Follow me." And *immediately* they dropped their nets and followed.

Just a little ways further down the shore sat another set of brothers – only they weren't standing in the water or using a little cast net. *They* were sitting in father's *boat* mending the nets you would toss out into the deep. Painted on the side of the boat was "Zebedee and Sons Fishing Co." A boat made all the difference. A boat put you above the water... over the water... *out* of the water. You could move out to the deep and cast your net for bigger fish – not just bait fish. This is what success looked like – a multigenerational company that had the beginnings of a fleet at their disposal.

Do hear the difference?

One set of brothers was:

- small business
- hard labor
- no employees
- blue collar – "Two Guys and a Net Fishing"

The other set of brothers was:

- big business
- had commercial equipment
- managed multiple employees
- white collar – "Zebedee and Sons Fishing Co."

So, according to Mark, the first thing Jesus does in his public ministry is call two sets of brothers to follow him who had the exact same profession, but one set was blue collar and other was white collar.

You know, as I read the gospels, Jesus is a lot of things. He's kind. He's quick-witted. He's charismatic. He's powerfully eloquent. He's sharp as a tack. He's single-minded in

his focus. He's funny. He's loving. He's generous with his attention. He's deeply spiritual. He's patient and gentle and a great story teller.

But there's one thing that Jesus is not, and that is haphazard. There seems to be no step he takes, no conversation he makes, no miracle he does, and no call he issues that is not done with purpose. He is one of the most intentional people who ever lived.

So the question for us is: what does he intend for us to learn by this? By making his very first act the calling of these two sets of brothers?

Blue collar and white collar — both called to the same mission, to the same purpose, into the same kingdom?

It turns out that we don't get to pick the Jesus who calls. We just get to decide if we'll follow in the model he gave us.

The Baptist pastor, Rev. Julie Pennington-Russell, tells this story:

"I have a friend. He's a man in his late 60's. Rugged, burly, brilliant guy. He's always reminded me a little of the Marlborough Man. He studied at a prestigious university in the East some years ago, and then he moved to Texas to work on his doctorate. But somewhere along the way he became addicted to cocaine — just tumbled into that dark hole. Lost his family, lost his place in graduate school, lost big pieces of himself. But somehow he washed up on the shores of a good church. And when he did, he was so fragile that he looked like he'd been 'rode hard and hung up wet' — as they say in Texas. But the folks in that church put their arms around that man and slowly he started to heal, and eventually, miraculously, even reunited with his wife and children.

We had this couple in our home for dinner and the man began to talk with Tim and me about where his life was going. 'I want to believe,' he said, 'that my best days aren't behind me, and that my life can still count, can still make a difference for God.' He sat at our table with his head in his hands. 'I just can't help but feel like I've blown all of my best chances,' he said. That's when his wife, who's just this wonderful, middle-aged, bohemian-Texas-flower-child-kind-of-woman, reached over and took his hand. And I'll never forget what she said. She said, 'Baby, you've got to take your sticky fingers off that steering wheel. If God could yank Jesus out of a grave, I figure he can make something beautiful out of busted parts.' And I tell you what — if I live to be a hundred and ten, I don't expect to hear the gospel better articulated than that ("Our First Calling," *Day1.org*, Sept. 7, 2008).

Jesus calls who Jesus wills. Maybe the first miracle Jesus performs in the gospel of Mark is not a healing or an exorcism or walking on water or feeding a multitude. Maybe the first miracle Jesus performs in the gospel Mark is calling brothers from two different castes of families and making them into one family.

The Jesus who saves each of us is the same one who saves *all* of us. He puts us through those waters and he says, "I'm going to make a church out of you yet. Come hell or high water, I'm going to make a church out of you!"

I hope that we'll let him — because I know myself well enough to know that I, least of all, deserve a place at that table. And any place I have is because of Jesus.

Fred Craddock is my favorite old, dead preacher. He used to tell this parable:

"I was walking one afternoon and I passed a corner where a man was doing something that fascinated me, and I stopped my walk and watched him. He had a pile of bricks, and the thing he was doing was measuring each brick — how long it was, how wide it was, how deep it was. He'd throw a bunch of good-looking bricks out.

He said, 'I've got to get them all exactly the same.'

I said, 'Why?'

He said, 'I'm building a church, and I want it to stand.'

See, there are people who think that the way to really have a church is to get people that are from the same economic and social and educational background, then they'll all be together. Boy, he started stacking those bricks; they were all just alike.

I went by the next afternoon, and it was just a pile of brick. Everything he built already fell down.

I went on around the corner, and I saw a man with a pile of rocks. You've never seen such a mess in your life — no two of them alike, round ones, dark ones, small ones, big ones, and little ones.

I said, 'What in the world are you doing?'

He said, 'I'm building a church.'

I said, 'You're nuts! The guy down there had them all alike, and he couldn't make it stand!'

He said, 'This'll stand, this'll stand.'

'It won't either.'

'Yes it will.'

I said, 'You can't get it to stand. The fellow down there had them all...'

He said, 'It'll stand.'

And he went over to a wood tray, took something like a hoe, and began to stir something back and forth. Looked a lot like cement to me, but that's not what he called it. He put healthy doses of that between the stones. I went back thirty-four years later, and it was still there. It was that stuff in between, looked a lot like cement. But that's not what he called it.

You know what he called it." (*Craddock Stories*, pp. 148-149)

He called it Jesus.

You see, from the outside, this old church is made of brick — each one made of the same substance, same color, same dimensions.

But if you come inside, that's not what you'll find at all. What you'll find is that this church is made of people — and we aren't all the same color... or the same dimensions... or even made of the same substance. The only thing we share is that each of us was called by Jesus.

He'll make a church out of us yet, if we'll let him.

Amen.