

March 31, 2019

Lesson 5: Called to Discipleship

Scripture: Matthew 4: 12-22

Context:

This week's lesson continues with a reexamination of the call stories of the disciples and Jesus beginning his ministry. This is a text that deals with calling and how all in Jesus's ministry had specific roles to play. All of it builds up to Jesus's inaugural address that will be the Sermon on the Mount where he gives instructions on how to live and how to follow him.

The first paragraph gives voice to Jesus and how he will fulfill the words of the prophets as he brings light to those in darkness.¹ He is different from his cousin John and will be doing ministry in a different area. Echoing from the book of Isaiah, there is a description of how Jesus will fulfill his ministry and then he names it as he begins to preach about his purpose.

The second paragraph moves to discuss how Jesus begins to fulfill the prophecy by walking along the Galilee Sea and calling the disciples. He starts with two sets of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John. When Jesus finds them, all he says is: "Come, follow me, and I'll show you how to fish for people." It may sound like a strange invitation, but it fits with the narrative of the church and also reflects the times of Jesus's day.

In the ancient world, Jewish men were expected to be educated on matters of the faith. It was not unusual for rabbinic students to seek a master and choose to learn from him.² To a certain degree, we do the same with Jesus. We choose to follow him and make him our master and Lord. At a deeper level of humanity, we acknowledge that the reverse has been true.³ Jesus has chosen us and in this case, Jesus has chosen the disciples who will follow him wherever he goes.

Jesus is clearly a good teacher and master. He knows that in order to entice the disciples though, he must speak in their language. In this case of the fishermen set of brothers, Jesus lures them in by telling them that he will take them and make them fish for people. These proficient fishermen will now become fishers of people, helping them to become fellow disciples of the master.

Application

Three weeks ago, we read the two call stories found in the gospels of Mark and Luke. The first was on the call of the disciples and the second was on the calling of the crowds. This week focuses more on the call part than the cost of the call.

From the first paragraph, we are reminded that Jesus was the model of call. He

¹ Douglas A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1992), 27.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

left his hometown of Nazareth to go to Capernaum, fulfilling the prophecy of what he was going to do. Jesus modeled that a call is about a lifestyle. He had a purpose even before the people he was sent to lead knew that he was coming.

In the second paragraph, we hear that the disciples also had a calling they did not realize at first. The start of their lives was a call to be fishermen like their fathers. Yet God's plan for them was to be fishers of men and women, a twist on their call story. They would be fishing, but not for the fish in the Sea of Galilee. It was an evolution of their call.

When we read this text, we are reminded that calling is a sacred term to describe what people do. Sometimes we know it from an early age while others have to experience and discern it over a period of time. Fredrick Buechner once said: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." For some people this comes from one moment where they experienced great joy and for others it is a succession of experiences where they wrestled with: "Is this what you've called me to do Lord?"

Whenever I hear people say that "calling" is a word only for ministry, I become a little disheartened. I think that everyone has a calling. Whether it is to be a general practitioner to diagnose the illnesses of those around them or a stay home mom to take care of the kids, I think God calls people to those places. Whenever you are doing what you love and what you feel called to do, you are participating in God's kingdom.

One of the things that I love about the United Methodist Church is the focus on the equality between the clergy and the laity. In our Book of Discipline, we have them designated as calling. Elders are called to preach and teach the scriptures, lead in worship, preside over the administration of the sacraments, order the life of the church, and lead the church to serve in the world. Deacons are called to teach and preach the scriptures, to lead the church in service in the world, to seek justice ministries, and participate in ministries of compassion. Laity are called to go into the world, be with the everyday people, and be in ministry beside the clergy.

All of the roles are important and you cannot have one group without the other. All of us though are called to a life of discipleship. We are called to have private prayer time, attend corporate worship, do deeds of mercy and kindness, and search for ways to be like Christ in our world. A clergy cannot do it for the laity. And laity cannot expect the clergy to do all those things for them so they can just watch. Being a disciple is not a spectator sport. All of us have been called to be "fishers of men and women."

How do you feel like your job is a calling? How do you feel like it forms you as a disciple whether you're a doctor, a plumber, a teacher, or a stay at home mom? How do you work beside the clergy to be in ministry together? How do you understand discipleship? Better yet, who are you helping to disciple? These are the kinds of questions that the scripture today inspires and gives direction for our lives.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church
1380 W. Main St.
Dothan, AL 36301
E-mail: hunter@fumcdothan.org

