

Epiphany 2, Year A,

19th January, 2020

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 NRSV / John 1:29-42 NRSV

Name Calling

When we hear the term “calling,” what comes to mind?

In the context of one’s own calling,

most of us would probably think of what we are “called to,”

that task or vocation that we seemed to be perfectly suited for.

Probably more often we hear the reverse of that, in the common phrase,

“he or she missed his or her calling,”

meaning that person shows tremendous talent

that they are not using as their vocation or focus in life.

Often we think of calling as related to what we do for a living,

but it really speaks to those things that we have particular skills for

or those things we seem to have a natural talent for.

I have known people whose calling is to be parents,

who just seem to be inherently good at raising great kids.

This morning we’ll be looking at calling from the perspective of faith.

In our text from John, a large portion of the story

has to do with this concept of calling, or “being called.”

One’s calling, what one has inherent skills at, and what one is being called to,

is not necessarily the same.

For example, I have pretty natural office administration skills,

and could consider that a calling, but that is not, and has not,
been what I have been called to.

In our story today, we are introduced to Andrew, and eventually his brother Simon.

We know from other gospel stories that they are fishermen.

Their father was most likely a fisherman too,

and they probably had skills that they either acquired naturally

or through a lifetime of tending boats and nets.

Most likely, we would consider fishing to be their calling.

Yet when we meet Andrew in the story, he's not fishing.

He's a disciple of John the Baptist.

He's not on a boat on the Sea of Galilee,

he's many miles away following John in the desert

around the Jordan river.

When he meets Jesus, the first question Jesus asks is, "What are you looking for?"

That question has more layers than what appears on the surface.

Obviously Andrew's current calling wasn't what he was really seeking.

If he's with John, he's walked away from his boat and nets.

He is seeking something else, some meaning and purpose

that he wasn't finding pulling fish out of the water

day in and day out.

So he strikes out to follow this prophet in the wilderness.

Maybe he was seeking adventure,

some new experiences outside of the sleepy little village of Bethsaida

where he had spent all of his life to that point.

Maybe he was heading out to the wilds where the Zealots hung out,
looking to make a difference in resisting the Roman occupation
and the corrupt leadership of Judea.

He might of then run into John, and decided to join along with John's cult,
imagining that maybe this messianic utopia John spoke of
was what he was looking for.

Whatever the reason, Andrew and his friend
found themselves in the company of the Messiah:
not just another prophet like John, but the real deal.

John testifies to them as a witness.

He was there when the heavens opened; he heard the voice.

This is the one he was preparing the way for,
the one who is God in human flesh.

Here might be the answer to what they are looking for.

Unlike Matthew's account from last week, it is the story of God
declaring truth from above,

but John the Baptist telling his story as one human to another.

John's gospel differs in that respect, in it's directness.

The other gospels, like Matthew,

go to great length to tie Jesus

to the Old Testament prophecies such as those found in Isaiah.

But biblical scholarship generally agrees that John was written

for the early churches in Asia Minor, such as the one at Ephesus.

The audience there would not be as steeped

in Jewish scripture and tradition,

and a direct approach would be more effective.

Right off the bat, John the Baptist testifies

that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” that will take away the sins of the world.

He relates his own prophecy received directly from the Almighty

that who he witnesses anointed by the Spirit in the form of the dove

will be the One.

The other gospels tend to be more indirect.

They hint around about who Jesus is,

but never outright declare it until much later in the story.

Instead of drawn out genealogies establishing the birthright of Jesus,

John starts by putting him there at the beginning of time,

with the Creator, as an integral part of the creation of everything.

This is the guy John the Baptist has been preaching about.

So they ask approach Jesus to see where he is based, where his tent is pitched.

And he responds, “Come and see.”

Again, there are layers to be dug into here.

Jesus wasn’t just inviting them back for afternoon tea and chit chat.

There’s a sense of invitation here,

of inviting them to tag along and be a witness about him

like John the Baptist.

They're invited to come and see the change he is making,
to be a witness and to share their testimony like John before them.

Andrew then went and collected his brother Simon,
excited to bring him to meet the Messiah that John had revealed.

When they again caught up with Jesus,
he renames Simon to Cephas, or Peter, which means rock or foundation.

So not only are Andrew and Simon, now Peter, finding their calling,
but being called as well.

"Come and see" is an open invitation to join in the journey,
to be part of this novel endeavor, of God made flesh starting something new.

We often look with hindsight at Peter's naming
and can agree Peter indeed became the rock and foundation of the infant church,
living up to his name.

But he certainly didn't fit the bill when he got that name.

In fact, that is one fact all four gospels agree on.

He struggled to live into that name.

He had major doubts.

He failed to live up to that name many times.

It was not something we would have had a clue could be his calling,
and probably was quite intimidating for him

once he had a chance to reflect..

Yet he ultimately grew into the call, it became his calling.

If you had told me twenty years ago my calling was in ministry,

I'd have thought you were crazy, yet here I am.

A story is told by theologian Fredrick Beuchner.

It is a story about a man who was born with an awful facial deformity.

He grew up alone and lonely.

When reaching adulthood, he decided to move from his town
to begin a new life.

On his way he discovered a beautiful mask that fit his face,
making him look handsome.

At first the mask was uncomfortable
and he was afraid that people would find out who he really was,
but he continued to wear the mask everyday.

In his new hometown, he made many friends and fell in love.

But one day a woman from his old home came to his town
and discovered this man's true identity.

In front of his friends and fiancé, she forced him to remove his mask.

When he removed the mask, it revealed a handsome face.

His face had conformed to the mask.

Like Peter, our calling may not seem like a good fit at the beginning,
but we often grow into that call.

John's gospel has a heavy emphasis on this sense of God calling us,
of being the one who makes the initial action,
and the response being ours to make.

Do we heed the call, and follow that calling?

There are a lot of seekers out there in the world today,
people like Andrew and company who are desperate for meaning,
for finding a calling that makes a difference.

Some are looking for community, for a real place to belong
and really connect with other people in a real, non-internet way.

Some are looking for a concrete foundation for their lives,
others seek a connection with the Divine.

Some seek healing or comfort,
others may be seeking redemption,
a new life on the other sides of mistakes made or opportunities missed.

There are many answers to Jesus' question of
"what are you looking for, or seeking?"

And the same invitation still stands to "come and see" something
that they won't find in what the world has to offer,
something more than stuff,
something more than popularity and prestige,
something that can fill that void inside,
a higher purpose and calling that has real meaning.

The questions I have for you this morning are we answering the call?

Are we finding our calling, as individuals and as a community of faith?

Are we coming and seeing the work God is up to in the world today,
and more importantly are we witnessing and testifying

and participating in that work?

There's an old saying attributed to Christian mystic Teresa of Avila:

“Christ has not body on earth now but yours,
no hands but yours, no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world;

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.”

Are we those hands, feet, and eyes?

There's also an old Brethren saying, “Don't ask me if I'm a Christian, ask my neighbor.”

Do we witness and testify in how we live our lives, in all we say and do,

how we live our lives?

Would a seeker know they can find the answer they are looking for here?

We are all called, we all have a calling.

My hope and prayer is that we as individuals and as a community,

answer that call and follow our calling, as Christ's disciples in this world. Amen.