

Sunday, January 26, 2020
Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Year A)
Matthew 4.12-23
The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

"On Being Called"

Today we hear Matthew's account of Jesus recruiting his first four disciples: brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, and brothers James and John; fishermen all. Most versions of the Bible refer to this as the "calling of the first disciples." In the church, we use the unique language of "call" to describe someone being invited into ministry. Called, as opposed to being hired, recruited, drafted, or even volunteered. While "calling" does mean "the vocation or profession in which one . . . engages," in religious circles it carries the added meaning of an "impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by . . . divine influence."ⁱ Pursuing a ministry because of a sense of being called by God or Christ. Even though we talk about "being called" or having a "sense of call," it is sometimes misunderstood, even in the Church. Often times, having a "calling" is perceived as being unique to clergy and religious professionals. But that is only because in our process toward ordination, we are continually asked about our sense of call and are required to talk about it ad nauseam.

As we see in our Gospel reading, the call to follow Jesus, the call to discipleship, is not exclusively or even primarily a call to ordained or professional ministry. The life of discipleship is open to all people. The calling to discipleship is open to all people. It is about serving God and Christ in the midst of our chosen fields of pursuit. Jesus does not call his disciples to become religious professionals. He does not call them to be rabbis or preachers or evangelists. He called them to follow him, to be faithful to him, and to help him spread his message. He says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Mt 4.19). Actually, a pretty ingenious and non-threatening invitation. He is inviting them to follow him using terms they can understand, based on their profession as fishermen. He is conveying the essence of his ministry in terms they can understand. Terms related to what they already know how to do. Instead of catching fish, they will help Jesus gather people for the Kingdom of God. If they had been teachers, he probably would have said "Follow me, and together we will teach others how to live the Gospel." If they had been doctors, he probably would have said, "Follow me, and together we will heal the hurts of the world." If they had been engineers, he probably would have said, "Follow me, and together we will build the Kingdom of God." You get the idea.

Today's Gospel, puts the call to follow Christ in the context of those being called. In ways they can understand and relate to. No special "churchy" language that can be confusing to the uninitiated. Merely an invitation to take what we are already doing in our lives and using those skills and talents that we already have and are already good at, and using them to work with Christ to spread the Gospel, to further God's purposes. That's a big part of what ministry in the Church is about—helping people identify their gifts, talents, and passions; and connecting them with ministries where they can use them in God's service.

That is one of the main reasons we have annual meetings. Well, of course we do it because our bylaws say we have to. We do it because we need to elect new Vestry members and delegates

to Diocesan Convention. That's all the stuff that is legally required. But even more importantly, we have annual meetings as a way of informing our parishioners about the various ministries we are engaged in, honoring those who are engaged in those ministries, and inviting you to join us in using your own gifts, talents, and passions to further the Gospel.

ⁱ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calling>