

Sermon

1.21.24

Year B

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

“Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.”

Good morning, St Dunstan Family!

Welcome everyone.

Just in case you don't know, you are looking at the newest ordained priest in Diocese of Texas.

Whew! And Praise God!

I love history and I need science. Here is a story that combines the two.

Here is a story of two young men, Alex, and Tom. They lived in the mid1800's.

The first young man had an inventor's mind and a merciful heart.

He was only 25 when he opened a school in Boston, for teachers of the deaf.

A few years later, Alex married a beautiful young woman named Mabel who was hearing impaired.

Because he had a heart for those who could not hear, he soon began work on an instrument to help the deaf hear.

Young man #2: The other young man tried bookkeeping and found it boring,  
next he tried his hand at carpentry and found it exhausting.

Persistent, he found work in a Boston machine shop which Alex owned.

Alex liked Tom and hired him to help with building a new variation of telegraph.

After 2 years of working on their various projects, their current creation just on the verge-

Alex bids out his employee, "Watson, come here, I want you!"

Those words called out by Alexander Graham Bell memorialized Thomas Watson's name in history.

Their invention, the telephone, changed the world. It affects us to this day.

That is truly a "call story" of the very first phone call ever made!

August of 2020 over in Austin, I first arrived at seminary. It was 127 degrees.

One of my favorite things when I met new colleagues was to sit down at the 'Episco-pool" and hear their **call story**: how God called them to ministry.

I love sharing my call story, of how I was called to the ministry. I would love to share that with you sometime. And, I would love to hear your story.

I find it fascinating that the God of the universe cares enough about individuals and calls each of us to service.

So, what is a call story?

A call story tells of an encounter with God. It also shows how the most unlikely of us can be called to extraordinary ministry. Ministry comes in a wide variety- yes, feeding the hungry, helping with finding shelter, and baptizing, but ministry also means doing laundry for the umpteenth time this week, providing for your family, cleaning toilets, and offering a word of encouragement by sending a text to someone is hurting.

You have a call story.

Our Gospel reading today shares about **call stories from some of the most unlikely influencers.**

The book of Mark jumps right in. The first line of the Gospel introduces Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of God" and the account that follows is clearly meant to confirm this identity.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' birth or childhood.

Unlike John, in the book of Mark, we learn nothing about the "Incarnation" ... of God coming to earth as a human being. Instead, Mark plunges right into Jesus' public ministry. In a few short paragraphs, we hear about:

Jesus' preparation for ministry

the role of John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah,

the baptism of Jesus by John,

and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness by Satan.

Before we can catch our breath, Jesus launches into his ministry, announcing the kingdom of God, calling out to 2 different sets of brothers to follow him: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, then there were James and his brother John.

Let's give some context to our story. The province of Galilee is about 50 miles long and 25 miles wide. Many you have been to Camp Allen. Camp Allen is 49 miles from here. Galilee is surrounded by hills. On the eastern border is the freshwater Lake of Galilee. It's takes up about half of the space, being 14 miles long and 7 miles wide. Back in Jesus day, Galilee was one of the most densely populated provinces in all the Middle East. (Kind of like Houston is today)

So, you can see why this would be a strategic place to begin a ministry.

From our Gospel reading, Mark 1 verse 15, we read,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

A more literal translation of "believe the good news" would be "trust in the gospel."

The Kingdom, the reign of God, has come near because God's son, Jesus, is here among us. To follow Jesus, one must turn and go in a totally different direction, away from the things of the known culture and go toward him. As we see the brothers who left the family business, along with everything familiar to follow this new reality they sensed within their heart. Here means to go toward something countercultural- towards Jesus, towards unconditional love, towards forgiveness. This is good news. It is the best news!

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus and Peter already met. We also know that Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist. Like siblings do when they are excited about something, they want each other to know as well. Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to meet Jesus earlier. This is not the first time they have laid eyes on each other.

In verse 17, 'come follow me' is not an offer nor an invitation. It is a command to be met either with the obedience or disobedience.

It is a call they can either respond to or ignore. You and I have that same choice.

Andrew and Peter according to the Gospel of Mark, they respond immediately.

So what does that mean?

They each saw something completely different in the person of Jesus as he called them to leave the familiar and follow him. Jesus has that same compelling essence about him when you and I encounter him.

When I think about encountering Jesus, immediately this one word that comes to mind is the word... awe. A meeting with God Incarnate creates a feeling of awe. It is something that can't quite be explained but it is how I feel here with the Eucharist. It is also the feeling I experience upon seeing

God's handiwork, whether found in nature- looking across the turquoise waters of the Caribbean or the panoramic views found in the Texas Hill Country.

Awe is something I also experience when I get to be with people, hear their life stories, learn about who they are and what made them that way. Of course, I stand in awe of what people create: paintings and poetry, film and fiction, bridges, and indoor plumbing.

Awe is something I have been interested in for a while now. Awe can be a fleeting feeling and utterly difficult to explain.

Anyone listen to podcasts? I listen to a podcast called *Mockingbird*. The premise of their podcast they say "lies the conviction that none of us ever move beyond our need to hear the basic good news of God's Grace. Hence the name "Mockingbird," which refers to that bird's peculiar habit of repeating the song it has heard, over and over again." I NEED to hear about God's grace over and over. I also hear about the awesomeness of God.

The podcast mentioned a book, *"Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How it Can transform your Life"* by Dackner Keltner." Keltner is professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Keltner writes, "Awe is the emotion we experience when we encounter vast mysteries that we don't understand." He also stated, "In teaching about happiness for more than twenty years, I have seen how much health and well-being we gain by being amazed at things outside ourselves...by finding awe."

That is why these four people followed Jesus. They experienced the awe of God in person.

Jesus found them as they were. Fishing to them was ordinary. I find awe in the ordinary of doing the daily things in life- driving down Cypresswood, drinking my 1 cup of coffee every morning, looking out

my office window, talking to people. Think about your daily habits and routines. Just as you live in your dailyness, so did Peter and Andrew, James, and John. Just as Jesus called them out of their ordinary life, so Jesus calls to us. That's the beauty of the God who calls us. We're just us.

Henri Nouwen was a spiritual thinker and writer who wrote about the life of Jesus and the love of God in ways that have inspired countless people to trust God more fully. Nouwen was a preacher, teacher, and priest.

What makes Henri's work still so approachable was his candidness about life and his own struggles and brokenness.

"You are not what you do, although you do a lot.

You are not what you have collected in terms of friendships and connections, although you might have many.

You are not the popularity that you have received.

You are not the success of your work.

You are not what people say about you, whether they speak well or whether they speak poorly about you.

All these things that keep you quite busy, quite occupied, and often quite preoccupied are not telling the truth about who you are.

I am here to remind you in the name of God that you are the Beloved Daughters and Sons of God, and that God says to you, "I have **called** you from all eternity and you are engraved from all eternity in the palms of my hands. You are mine. You belong to me, and I love you with an everlasting love."

Henri also said that as Christians we are **called** to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but our own vulnerable self... That is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love.

The great message that we have to carry, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.”

In other words, just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, each one of us is called to “Follow Him.” I invite you to experience the awe of following Jesus.