

Roots  
Let's Go!

Megan and I are the kind of people who love thinking back on our lives and saying, "Remember when..." There's just something about reliving memories (good or bad) and smiling at them from afar which gives us great joy. Since we've been here for about a year now we've recently spent a bit of time reminiscing about the past year (remember how the day after we arrived we got more than a foot of snow and couldn't drive anywhere for days...). I've also thought a bit about when I first heard about the opening here at ZPC. It's kind of a weird thing, but it's pretty amazing what, through cyber-stalking, you can find out about places and people even before you've ever been to a place or met a person.

So, before I ever interviewed with the Nominating Committee from ZPC we had already found out much about ZPC and this area. We'd used Google Street Maps to virtually travel down Zionsville's Main Street. (We'd even picked out the places we'd want to hang out like Eagle Creek Coffee Shop and Old Time Ice cream (both which closed before we got here!)). Megan had begun looking at what housing was like and had picked out a preferred location. We'd of course thoroughly researched the ZPC website, read about the staff and learned more of ZPC's history. I'd google mapped the distance between Zionsville and where my best friend lives in Marion. I'd scoped out the nearest Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts and Red Robin. And ALL that before I'd even had the first interview.

The reason, to be sure, is not because I thought I was a "sure thing" for getting this call. No, I did it for the same reason that most of us do those sorts of things. Because before I got very far down the road I wanted to be certain that there were no major red flags, nothing that would say, "We can't go there, they don't even have a Red Robin." It's called doing your homework and I think most of us see the wisdom in that.

Which, of course, stands in marked contrast to what we see going on in our story today. The question that is most often asked when it comes to this particular passage is, "How in the world could Simon and Andrew and James and John just leave what they're doing and start following this guy Jesus?" Jesus called them by saying "Follow me" and they drop their nets and boat and follow him. Where's the homework? Where are the questions? There's no saying, "Wait, let me google map this out first" or "Can you tell me a bit more about yourself." Heck, there's not even something like "Where are we headed?" or "Your name's Jesus, right?" Just drop and follow. It's really, really hard for us to understand how they so easily answered that call.

It would be nice to have more details to this story, but as we mentioned last week Mark is not big on details. But again, as readers of Mark we do know that while the volume of what he says might not be great, the way he says things is of utmost importance. Which is why it's important to see that there is probably a connection between what Mark says right before Jesus calls the disciples and when the disciples dropped what they were doing and followed him. And what is right before is Jesus proclaiming the good news of God, that the time is now, that the Kingdom of God has come near and that this is the time to turn to him. In other words, as NT Wright says it, the living God is on the move right now. The time they've been waiting for, when God is going to rule, when what is wrong is going to be made right, has come. And I would suggest that it is those words about the good news of God's kingdom that for Mark are the reasons why James, John, Andrew and Simon so quickly followed Jesus. There was something about Jesus that when he told them the good news that the kingdom of God was near, when he called out to them to follow him, they answered.

One of the things that intrigued me is that word "call." Jesus called them and they came. When it comes to our faith we frequently use it when we talk about situations like this when we first start following Jesus and we also often use it when someone decides that they are "called" to be a pastor. With some frequency I get asked the question, "When were you called to the ministry?" Well, I'm glad you asked! As I told you last Sunday I always knew I wanted to talk, but wasn't sure what I wanted to talk about. So, I bandied about several vocations where speaking seemed to be front and center. When I went to college I wanted to be a sports broadcaster. I couldn't think of a cooler job. I mean getting paid to talk about and watch sports? It just doesn't get any better than that! After a year or so in college I began thinking more about becoming an attorney. A Few Good Men had come out not long before and so I imagined myself standing in court, wowing jurors and responding to people saying, "You can't handle the truth!" I even spent a semester in Washington D.C., interning with an attorney in hopes that it would be stepping stone. But well, that one semester was all it took for me to see that perhaps being an attorney wasn't exactly my calling.

Instead, after that semester, I thought maybe I would go into politics and change the world in that way. I applied to grad schools in political science and pictured myself regaling others with the importance of this plan or that law. But then, that desire started to wane as well and so I started thinking that perhaps what I really wanted was to be a professor. I loved graduate school, loved learning and started dreaming about sitting by a roaring fireplace, with my tweed jacket (with the elbow pads), smoking a pipe and saying erudite things while my adoring underlings sat in awe. And so, when I went to seminary my hope was not to become a pastor, but to become a professor. The truth is that becoming a pastor was truly the last thing in the world that I ever wanted to do.

But at seminary I was required to do a church internship and so begrudgingly I headed off to Charleston, West Virginia, to get it over with. And then several weeks later something happened. What happened is that I couldn't fall asleep and I

couldn't fall asleep because, as strange or hokey as it may sound, I had begun to imagine what it might look like to be a part of a community that lived as if they genuinely believed what Jesus told the disciples that day on the sea of Galilee. That with the coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God had come near. It would be the kind of community that believed that if Jesus is active and near even now then the way in which he lived his life is the way the church, his body, is called to live its' life. It means living day-to-day like God really did tear open the heavens to get to us. It means being hospitable and loving to our neighbors, our enemies and the least of these. I thought about how cool it would be to work alongside of those who wanted to bring hope to the addicted and who wanted to share Jesus and bread with the hungry. To be with a people whose lives were changed by the forgiveness and grace of Christ and who, because of that, would no longer be content to simply live for themselves. I know it sounds weird, but I couldn't lay still; I was so excited I just kept sitting up and squirming and imagining what it would be like to be a part of that kind of community that was truly following the Jesus that was walking along the Sea of Galilee, the one we read about in scripture. And that night, that one night, though I had been raised in the church and had people suggest it for years, it was that night, in those moments, that I knew I had been called by Jesus to not just be a part of a church like that, but to my great surprise, to do my best to lead one.

Which is why, as strange as it may sound, I'm not sure I find it all that crazy that the disciples so quickly answered the call of Jesus, even if all they heard was Jesus' good news that the kingdom of God was near. Because, quite honestly that was probably all that they needed to hear. It was enough to spark their imagination to the reality that the way things were, was not the way they had to be. It was enough to allow them to believe that if this Jesus is for real and if God really is on the move and if his kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven, then they didn't want to miss it. In fact, perhaps the crazier thing would have been if they said "no" to Jesus and decided to just keep doing what they'd always done, keep mending the nets and cleaning the fish. Because once you've been called by Jesus, once you've tasted of the good news of the gospel, I think you become too excited to resist being a part of it. And while they may not have known exactly where they were going or what was in store for them, they knew that they were a part of something much bigger than themselves, a part of the coming kingdom of God and that by following Jesus they were making a difference, not just for themselves, but for the world.

There is an excitement, it seems to me, when you get a sense of the call of Jesus on your life and when you realize that you have an opportunity to participate in God's kingdom. The excitement of answering that call is what allowed those 4 men, as crazy as it may have seemed to everyone else, to drop what they were doing and follow Jesus. The excitement of that night for me, to imagine what a community of Christ could be was enough for me to drop every reservation I had ever had about being a pastor and just say, "Alright, let's do it."

To be sure, it wasn't like I didn't like church or Jesus. I was usually very happy to be a part of church, but quite honestly I was rarely excited about it or my faith. I liked

going to worship, I enjoyed having friends at church, I was even okay going to committee meetings, but none of those things were all that exciting because by and large I never felt like we really believed that Jesus was alive in our midst or that we could actively participate not just in church, but in being a part of God's kingdom. And so, while I was happy to be there, there was certainly no part of me whose kingdom imagination was sparked by the thought of leading a church.

But on that night, the happiness of being at church was replaced with the excitement of following the call of Jesus, whatever that meant, wherever that took me. And while I have certainly not been perfect at it, by no means, I do think it's important for you all to know that this is why I am much less interested in being a happy church and much more intrigued by being a people excited because they have heard the call to follow Jesus and to participate in God's kingdom. In other words, the things that allow people to leave what is secure and run after Jesus, the things that kept me up that night, are not about being happy or living your best life now. I don't want to be rude, but I also need to be honest. If I hear that you are happy I will smile, be glad and then I will roll over and go to sleep. But if I get a sense that you have felt the call of Jesus and are responding to God's kingdom then I might as well not even lie down.

What I'm saying is that while we can be happy that our attendance is up over the last year it pales in comparison to how excited we should be that this past week one of these new people heard the call and said they wanted to start reading the Bible. While we can certainly be happy that we seem to be in good financial shape right now, we should be elated when someone handed me a check last month and said, "Not long ago I would have kept this extra money, but now I want to give it away." In other words, I'm investing in the Kingdom of God. While we can celebrate that we have over 200 people signed up for home groups, what should really be exciting us is how Doug Conner said that the home group allowed him to move past superficial relationships and start really getting to know people. That is how we grow as disciples. While we can certainly rejoice when one of our high schoolers gets into a good college or university, the deep joy should come when, as someone told me a while back, her mission trips to Mexico had reshaped her understanding of her own calling by Jesus.

Look, I'm grateful when people are happy with the church, but I don't ever read that this is what's really important to Jesus. Jesus didn't approach the boats and say, "Hey, if you're not happy, come follow me." He said "The Kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news." What Jesus wants is people who are excited because they know they have been called by Jesus and that they get an amazing opportunity to participate in the Kingdom of God right here and right now. We might get less sleep, we might not always know where we're going, but we will experience Jesus and one another in ways we never could if we simply stayed in our boats or rested in our beds. The kingdom of God has come near and Jesus has said, "Follow me." Do we believe it? Will we answer that call?