

CALLING
Sermon for Epiphany 3B- Mk 1:14-20
LPC, 1/21/18

Let's talk about vocation. Not *vacation*, which I know some of you are wishing you could take right now and go to someplace warm, but *vocation*.

We may associate vocation with profession or job. We do call schools that train people for specialized jobs vocational schools, but vocation is not synonymous with profession or job.

A job is something you do for pay, to earn a living. A job can also be a discreet objective. A plumber, for example, may have a series of jobs on any given day.

A profession is slightly different from a job. A profession is often, though not always, something you receive advanced training for, and which to some extent becomes what you are, so that you keep your profession even after you stop receiving pay for it. Doctors continue to be called "Dr." even after they retire, and I will be a "reverend" till I die, unless they kick me out.

A vocation is something different still. The word vocation is from the same root as "voice," "vocal," and "evoke." It literally means "calling." There is a voice involved. This voice is not just speaking, or making just any kind of noise or pronouncement. The voice is calling. The idea of calling connotes two things. First, it is relational: calling has an object. One calls to another. The voice is not just talking to itself. Secondly, calling connotes some urgency. Calling is not a casual conversation between persons. There is some kind of appeal involved.

So you see that the ideas of vocation or calling, and job or profession are not interchangeable. Not that these ideas are mutually exclusive. A job or profession can be a vocation, and a vocation can be a job or profession. But not every job or profession is a vocation, and not every vocation is a job or profession.

Not everyone has a job. But everyone has a vocation. Vocation is in fact deeply characteristic of the way God works in the world and the relationship Christians believe God has with humankind.

How do we believe God works in the world? First, we believe that God is, in fact, at work in the world, to bring creation to perfection. The Bible and the evidence of our own experience show that while God can zap things, to create, destroy or change them, God prefers not to act unilaterally, but with the cooperation of human beings.

One could question God's wisdom in this. For an all-powerful God to work with humans is inefficient, problematic and intensely frustrating. Why God voluntarily subjects Godself to this would be incomprehensible to us if we didn't find ourselves doing the same thing as parents and teachers. So, for reasons that can only be understood as the motivation of a loving parent, God chooses to work with human beings and is always recruiting human beings. God is always recruiting human beings because the work of redeeming the universe is large enough to employ every human being on earth.

God's method of recruitment is, in fact, vocation. God calls people to work with God in God's great project of redemption. This happens again and again in the Bible. God calls Abraham to leave his home and explore a new home place for God's people. God calls to Moses from the burning bush to lead God's people to freedom. God calls David from tending the sheep to be the king of God's people. God calls the prophet Amos away from his job as an arborist to speak God's word to God's people.

Likewise, Jesus calls his disciples to accompany him in his mission to spread his Gospel, and to take over this mission once he, Jesus, goes back to the Father. We heard one version of Jesus calling disciples last week from the Gospel of John, and we hear another this morning from the Gospel of Mark.

My thesis here is that we can tell something about how God calls us in our own Christian vocation from how Jesus calls his disciples.

First, in Mark's version, the disciples are not seeking Jesus. Jesus seeks them out. They are not looking for the Messiah, or just any guru to give their lives meaning. They are in the middle of doing something else ... their jobs in fact. They are fishing. Mark is going out of his way here to emphasize that the disciples became disciples through Jesus' agency alone. We don't become disciples through our own efforts or excellence. We become disciples because God calls us. So the first point is that God does the calling. We don't have to look for a calling. It finds us. In fact, in our baptisms it has found us.

Secondly, the prospective disciples are not particularly qualified for the job. They are fishermen. There is no evidence that they got straight A's in Hebrew School or were especially spiritual. Jesus took them as they were, because vocation is for everyone, not just the excellent.

Thirdly, although fishing does not seem to be particularly apt training for discipleship, Jesus seems to intend to use their fishing skills in helping him build the kingdom of God. He tells them, "I will make you fish for people." This is very typical of God's work in our lives, and in the matter of vocation. God wastes nothing. I'm always telling people this. God will take what you are and use it to make what you will be. God can use what you are to make the world what it will be.

Whatever your past experience, God can use it in God's work of redemption. God even uses your mistakes and weaknesses. God may even prefer to use your mistakes and weaknesses because, as I said last week, God is in the redemption business. Plus our mistakes and weaknesses tend to make us aware of our need to cooperate with God in what God is doing instead of trying to recruit God to help us with what we want to do.

Jesus calls us. God calls us through Jesus into participation in the work of redemption. God calls us through Jesus into building the kingdom: all those things I'm always preaching: feeding, healing, forgiving, visiting, caring, loving. Jesus calls us in spite of our lack of qualifications. Jesus even calls us through our mistakes and weaknesses.

How is God calling Lawrencefield Church? How is God calling you?