

## **“What’s YOUR Call Story?”**

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**Epiphany 5C**

**Based on Luke 5:1-11**

No matter where you start reading in the Bible, you are sure to come upon a story where someone is being called to serve God or follow Jesus.

In the Old Testament reading today we find God and Isaiah having a little chat. God informs Isaiah that he needs someone to go and tell the people about God and God’s ways. God wants to know if Isaiah is up for the job. Isaiah, in the shortest acceptance speech in the Bible, boldly declares, ‘Here I am; send me.’

Or what about the story of Saul? Saul was the chief persecutor of the Christian church, dragging Christians – men, women, and children – out of their houses and into the streets, then stoning them to death. But one day, while Saul was riding his horse, he was blinded by a bright, heavenly light. The light was so bright that it knocked Saul off his horse. Terrified, Saul heard a voice from heaven. There was no mistaking it. It was the voice of God.

“Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” God had another plan for Saul’s life. Ultimately, he became known as St. Paul, the most influential church leader of the early church.

Or think about Matthew’s story. One day Matthew was sitting at his tax collector’s booth, most likely counting his profits for that day. Jesus walks up, looks Matthew in the eyes and says, “Follow me.” Matthew doesn’t hesitate at all. He stands up, (grabs his money bag, I’m sure!) and follows Jesus, becoming one of the 12 disciples.

Some call stories in the Bible are somewhat comical, like the story about Nathanael. The Bible doesn’t say much about Nathanael, but it does tell how he decided to follow Jesus. Nathanael’s brother, Philip, had heard about the remarkable things Jesus had done. Philip was so excited that he just couldn’t help but tell his brother Nathanael all about Jesus. Nathanael became intrigued as well, that is, until he found out that Jesus was from the tiny, no-nothin’ town of Nazareth.

“Nazareth?” Nathanael chuckled. “You’ve got to be kidding me! Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Upon saying those words, a man walks up to Nathanael. Little does he know that it was Jesus himself. It’s like when you’re gossiping about someone and they walk around the corner. Ops!

Even though they have never met, Jesus seems to know everything about Nathaniel – his thoughts, his feelings, his deepest desires. Not knowing how else to dig himself out of the hole, Nathanael falls to his knees and worships Jesus. Jesus, choosing to forgive Nathaniel, invites him to come be a part of the gang.

That kind of story should give us hope. If Jesus invites two-faced people like Nathanael to be his disciples, then maybe – just maybe – there’s a place for us, too, in the kingdom of God.

Surely the call story that all of us can relate to is the story about Simon Peter in the gospel today. Simon is a fisherman. Jesus climbs into his boat and tells him to go out into the deep waters and throw out the nets. Sounds like a reasonable request for a fisherman, does it not?

But there’s a slight problem. Simon and his companions have already fished those waters all night long and they haven’t caught a thing. They are tired and hungry. They just want to go home, grab something to eat and then hit the sack.

Yet Jesus insists, so Simon (mumbling under his breath, I’m sure) pushes off the shore to go drop their nets once again. This time, as soon as the nets are dropped, the catch is so great that the nets begin to tear. They catch enough fish to fill two boats full. Both boats are on the verge of sinking because of the weight of the fish.

Simon Peter doesn’t know what to think or say, so he falls to his knees and asks for forgiveness for doubting. “Oh Lord, I’m too much of a sinner to be around you,” Simon confesses. Jesus, as he always does, replies with words of forgiveness and grace: “Don’t be afraid. If you are willing to follow me, I will show you how to catch as many people!”

We often assume that when it comes to disciples, the only people Jesus wants are perfect people – people who always have their priorities in the right order, people who always have the right thing to say, people who have a way of being true to their faith no matter what the circumstance.

But hearing all of these call stories today reminds us that the people Jesus chooses are just ordinary people like you and me – people whose priorities are all mixed up, who can’t help but gossip about others; people who judge others simply because of where they grew up, people who think they are smarter than Jesus.

Dare I say that the kind of people Jesus is looking for sounds a lot like people like us? Yes, disciples are people with baggage. But they are also people who have experienced the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ and it has literally transformed their lives.

Disciples are people who believe Christ died on the cross for their sins, who rose from the dead three days later, once and for all making their relationship with God OK. Disciples also know that gift of redemption changes everything. We are no longer defined by our past but are equipped by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God in this world.

If we are honest with ourselves, we, too, have our own call story. The fact that we have gathered here today is proof that Jesus has approached us – somehow, somehow – and has invited us to follow him. Maybe the call came through a parent or grandparent, a spouse or friend, through a Sunday School teacher or pastor. However Jesus approached you, the fact that you are here worshipping today tells me that you have heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come, follow me.”

And so we follow... at least, most of the time. Sometimes we are bold enough to answer like Isaiah and say, “Jesus, I hear you calling! Tell me where you want me, and I will go!” But other times we find ourselves making excuses. Like Abraham in the Bible, we use the excuse that we are too old. “I’ve done my share,” we say. “Let the young ones have a turn.” Or like Jeremiah, we use the excuse that we are too young to make a difference. “No one will listen to me anyway!” Like Moses we use the excuse that we are terrified of talking in front of people. Like Simon Peter, we use the excuse that we’ve already tried with no results.

I guarantee you that God has heard every excuse imaginable, especially from me when I heard God calling me into the ordained ministry.

When I was discerning my call, I remember taking out a sheet of paper and drawing a line to make two columns. Over the first column I wrote, “Why I SHOULD NOT become a pastor;” over the second column, “Why I SHOULD become a pastor.”

I had no problem filling up the entire column of why I SHOULD NOT become a pastor. But I could only think of one reason why I should – because it was God’s will for my life. The Holy Spirit made me realize that one reason, of it being God’s will, cancelled out every other excuse.

We all make excuses. We have no difficulty coming up with reasons why we aren’t qualified to do the tasks God has given us to do. But in the midst of all of our excuses, God makes a promise to us. And God’s promise cancels out all of our excuses.

The promise is this: Whenever I ask you to do something, God says, I promise that I will give you whatever you need to accomplish it. WOW! Did you get that? God says, Whenever I ask you to do something, I promise that I will give you whatever you need to accomplish it. I will turn your weaknesses into strengths. I will turn your

timidity into bold faith. I will bless you with whatever gifts you need to do what I ask of you.

The very fact that I stand before you this day as an ordained pastor of the church is a testament to the truthfulness of that promise. God's Word can be trusted. God will give us whatever we need to do those things God asks of us.

When you begin to second guess yourself, I suggest that you open the Bible and begin reading. Because no matter where you start, you will soon encounter someone who thought they weren't qualified enough to be any use to God. And yet God called them anyway.

God saw something in them, and God sees something in each of us, that we are not capable of seeing in ourselves. Let us take the bold step of faith and fully give our lives to God and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Jesus is not looking for perfect people. Jesus is looking for people who are willing to faithfully follow him. Jesus is looking for those willing to get into the boat with him, to throw out the net as far as they can, and see what happens.

Just as Jesus says to Simon Peter in the boat, Jesus says to us: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you every step of the way. Put your trust in me."

Allow that incredible promise to make you bold in your faith, to see the power of God at work in your life. Above all, remember that even when the fish aren't biting, when nothing seems to be working, do not give up hope. In those moments, just glance over and see who's sitting right beside you in the boat- Jesus Christ himself. He will lead you in the right direction. Trust in his goodness and grace.

"Come, follow me," Jesus says, "and you will experience things far beyond your wildest dreams. Follow me, and you will receive blessings beyond what you ever could imagine."

Let us hear the voice of Jesus calling, and have the courage and the faith to follow. "Here I am; send me!" Amen.