

## **Your Vocation**

Mark 1:14-20

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 25, 2014

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I am not given to preaching about the interpretation of a passage. Rather I usually preach the interpretation of the passage to you. This morning, however, I think that we need to think about the interpretation of the passage.

The passage I am talking about is the Holy Gospel reading. Jesus says to Simon, "Come after Me and I will make you a fisher of men." Jesus finds James and John and calls them and they leave their father and his hired men in the boat and departed after Jesus.

I have heard numerous sermons preached on this passage. All of them seemed to go something like this: Jesus called Peter, James, and John to follow Him. Jesus calls us to follow Him. Peter, James, and John left everything and followed Jesus. And then after that the sermons get a bit murky.

The implication of such sermons is that you and I should leave everything and follow Jesus also. James and John left their father in the boat with the hired men. They were mending their nets when Jesus called them. They left their work in the middle of doing it and went after Jesus. They left their family behind and followed Jesus.

If we follow such a line of reasoning to its logical conclusion you and I should leave our families to follow Jesus. If we are youths, we should leave our parents and follow Jesus. If we are parents, we should leave our children and follow Jesus. If we have jobs of some kind, we should leave our jobs and follow Jesus.

Then the sermons keep on going. Jesus tells Peter that He will make Peter a fisher of people. The implication of Mark's account is that James and John are also fishers of men. The sermons then point out how we are fishers of people also. The implication of such sermons is that we should be out there convincing people to believe in Jesus. If such sermons are preached at a mission festival they are usually intended to imply that you folks should give money to the mission agency featured in order that they may convince people to believe in Jesus. In this way you will be fulfilling your calling to be fishers of people.

If that is the proper interpretation of the passage, then there are a couple of problems. In the Gospels Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for taking people away from their parents. He says that the commandment is that children shall honor their father and their mother, yet the Pharisees permitted a young person to say to their parents that any service their parents would have received from them is Corban, that is a gift devoted to God. The children would then leave their parents and go and serve in religious duties. Jesus called this practice a violation of the Fourth Commandment. Those youths should remain at home and honor their father and their mother.

That means that only Jesus Himself can get away with calling James and John away from their father in the boat. As the incarnate God our Lord can override the calling of father and mother and summon people to do other service than what is required by the Fourth Commandment.

Now, I am a representative of Jesus in the pulpit. Can I call you away from your families and your jobs to religious service? If I can, Jesus has not revealed that to me. If I am to stand here in the pulpit and say that you must leave families and farms and jobs to follow Jesus, it seems to me to be obvious that I should be able to tell you where to go? Shall I send you into missionary service across the seas? Shall I send you into service in the District or Synod's bureaucratic structure? Where shall I send you? I do not

think it is responsible for me to call you away from your families, jobs, and lands without giving you a realistic alternative.

Our Lord called Peter, James, and John to come after Him. He told them that He would make them fishers of people. He was ready and prepared to support them. Jesus had a following sufficient that He had funding. It was modest funding, but He had it. Out of this funding He provided for the apostles to eat and stay with Him while He did His ministry. Every once in a while Jesus would perform a miracle to feed them. Jesus provided them with an alternative means of support when He summoned them away from their jobs and their families.

I have no alternative means of supporting you if I were to call you away from your families and jobs.

So I have nowhere to send you. I have not means of supporting you if you did leave your homes and families. I have received no instructions from our Lord to issue such callings. Therefore I will not be calling you to leave your families and your jobs this morning. And young people of the congregation, neither am I going to provide with some slick theological way of disobeying your parents.

So what about Peter James and John? And for that matter what about us?

I think that so many of us have read these passages about Peter, James, and John and felt guilty about it. We have heard sermons preached on this passage of Mark's Gospel and we feel guilty about it. We feel guilty because we know that we have not left everything to follow Jesus. We have kept our homes, our land, our jobs, our families. Are we just selfish that we have kept these things and not given them all up to follow Jesus? Should we be giving more money to support mission projects around the world in order to make up for the fact that we have not left our homes, land, jobs, children and spouses? Well people, if you think that you can make for the fact that you have kept your home, land, and families by giving money to a missionary agency, you are going to have to give all of your money away. That is the only way to make up for it. Give it all away, all of it.

Some preachers take advantage of your guilt and get you to give to their missionary organization using this line of reasoning. But then how do you know that their missionary agency is the agency to whom Jesus wants you to give your money? How do you know that He doesn't want you to give to another missionary agency or start one of your own?

I have received no revelation from Jesus on this matter. Neither, I suspect, have you.

Here is the difference with Peter, James, and John. The incarnate God called them. Jesus Himself called them. The incarnate God who took on flesh and was born of the virgin Mary began His service to human kind. Among His first acts of service was to begin to call to Himself those men who would be His apostles. He begins with the men who will become known among us as His "inner circle."

Peter, James, and John are therefore unique. Only a few other people are directly called by the incarnate God. In other words only a few people received the call from God while He stood there in front of them in the flesh. Peter, James, and John are part of the select few.

It is obvious that they did not do anything to earn this calling. They were not even expecting this calling. Since the calling came directly from the incarnate Lord Himself, in this case the calling did supersede their families and their jobs. They left everything and followed Him.

That also means that the calling to be fishers of men applies only to them. They were special in the history of humanity in a way that you and I are not special. They saw the incarnate God. They saw what He did. They personally heard what He said. They saw all of His miracles. They saw His arrest and crucifixion. They saw the incarnate God after He rose from the dead. They saw Him ascend into heaven.

None of us in this room have seen those things. They saw them. We do not know what Jesus looked like. We do not know what He sounded like. We did not see Jesus crucified. We did not see Jesus after He rose from the dead. We did not see Jesus ascend into heaven. We believe these things because Peter, James, and John saw them and their testimony has come down to us. We believe their testimony about Jesus. They are apostles. And it is appropriate to call them the holy and blessed apostles. We would have no knowledge of the living Christ, if it were not for the apostles.

They are fishers of people because they have given us their testimony about Jesus. Because of their testimony we believe in Jesus. They did not have to convince us to believe in Jesus. In fact the apostles are now all dead. They have been dead for some time. Because they are dead, they are not able to convince us to believe in Jesus. Fortunately convincing others to believe in Jesus is not what a fisher of people does. What Peter, James, and John did was bear witness to what they saw when it came to Jesus. That testimony was written down and because that testimony was written down and because that testimony has been preached to us we have believed it. That is how they are fishers of men. They are still fishers of men even after they have died.

Their calling is special and unique.

You and I cannot duplicate that calling because Jesus has ascended into heaven. We did not see any of His miracles personally. We did not personally hear anything that He taught. We did not personally witness His crucifixion and resurrection. We did not personally see Him ascend into heaven. Because Jesus is the incarnate God, He is capable of speaking to us through the testimony of the apostles. So Jesus has spoken to us. We have seen His miracles. We have witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but we have done so only because the apostles saw it and told it to us.

Therefore our calling must be elsewhere. Where is our calling? Has Jesus called us to do anything and if so, what?

It is unfortunate that not even I as a pastor instruct the junior catechumens on the Table of Duties. This is something of which I am going to have to do better, but I will do my best. The Table of Duties is simply a list of Bible passages that are collected together in the catechism which tell us what our callings are.

For example, it says of pastors, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." That is from Titus 1:9. That is my calling. It is my calling from Jesus. Jesus called the apostles and it was an apostle who wrote Titus 1:9. Therefore this is my calling from Jesus through the apostles.

It says of congregations, "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." That is a quotation of 1Thessalonians 5:12-13. An apostle wrote 1Thessalonians. Therefore Jesus called the apostle to write that. Therefore these instructions for the congregation come from Jesus.

It says of citizens of a nation, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." This is your calling from Jesus as citizens of a nation. It also contains the calling for the government of any nation. That is from 1Peter 2:13-14 and Peter is the first apostle to be called according to Mark's Gospel.

The calling for husbands includes, "Love your wives and do not be harsh with them." Colossians 3:19. Furthermore the calling of wives includes "Submit to your husbands as to the Lord." Ephesians 5:22.

The calling for fathers, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4. By the way fathers of the congregation that is a more comprehensive statement than simply bringing them to Divine Service and Sunday School. Although it includes those things it is not limited to those things. My suspicion is that many fathers believe that if they just bring their children to the Divine Service and that's it when it comes to God that will be sufficient in raising them in the fear and instruction of the Lord. I think that the experience of the Church nowadays has proven that was ineffective in raising our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord. I could say more, but I do not wish to get off of the subject of our calling.

To workers Jesus gives this command, "Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear; and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ." Ephesians 6:5.

To masters or employers as we would call them Jesus gives these instructions through His apostles, "Do not threaten them (that is your employees), since you know that He who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him." Ephesians 6:9.

The Table of Duties in the catechism continues with further biblical quotations, but I think that these will serve for the present. These are the instructions of your Lord Jesus Christ on what your calling is. If I may use a simple list that is also in the catechism, your primary vocations from Jesus Himself are these: father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, worker. That is your calling.

For some people in the Gospels Jesus called them to leave everything and follow Him. But one fellow Jesus told, "Go home and tell your family how much God has done for you."

In light of the extensive Bible passages that I have just quoted to you, your vocation is the same. It is a holy calling. It is your calling. If you have children, then Jesus has called you to be their father or their mother. You are not their father or their mother on accident or through some circumstance in your life. And do not think that you chose to be their parents. I think that I stand as an example before you that people do not simply choose to become parents. Children are bestowed upon you. Yours were bestowed upon you. There is no use wishing to God that you had different children or different parents. Jesus has called you to the children that you have. They are your children. Jesus has called you to the parents that you have. They are your parents. You will not get other ones. If you are wishing that you had different ones then you are doing something that is against the will of Jesus. Since it is against the will of Jesus, it is therefore a sin. Repent!

If you are married, then God has either called you to be a husband or a wife. If you are a man and you are married, God has called you to be a husband. If you are a woman and you are married, Jesus has called you to be a wife. There is no use wishing that you had a different husband or a different wife. You are called to this person as long as you both shall live. If you wish for another, then you are wishing for something that is against the calling that Jesus has given to you and therefore against the will of Jesus.

If you are a worker, then Jesus has called you to that work. In the United States Jesus has granted to you the privilege of moving from one employer to another, but remember that is a privilege. Jesus has granted that privilege to the United States because of the righteousness that we had in the past. We may lose that privilege one day and soon be stuck with whatever vocation our Lord gives us, but for now we have that privilege, but while you are working treat the one for whom you work as if they were the Lord Christ Himself. And if you have people under your employ remember you have a Master in heaven. He is not only your Master, but also Master of those in your employ especially if those in your employ are members of the household of faith. How shall you treat the members of the household of faith? How do you think their master would want you to treat them?

Now, these are your callings. I like to call them vocations because that sounds fancier, but they are callings from Jesus nonetheless. Your callings are just as much from Jesus as the callings of Peter, James, and John are. Your callings are to be taken as seriously as Peter, James, and John took theirs especially after the Lord ascended into heaven. Your callings will require sacrifices that are just as painful as the sacrifices that Peter, James, and John made for their callings.

In a way, you are blessed. Jesus called Peter, James, and John away from their previous jobs and away from their families. Jesus has not called you away from such things. In fact Jesus has called you into those things. Peter, James, and John were unique. But do not be deceived by the apparent ease of your calling. Just because you do not give up everything the way that Peter, James, and John did does not mean that you will not give up everything in the callings that Jesus has given to you.

In your calling as father and mother you will eventually be asked by Jesus to give up everything. In some form or another, He will require you to give up something that you do not want to give up in order to fulfill the holy vocations of father and mother. In that moment everyone will find out including yourself whether or not you believe that Jesus has in fact called you to be father and mother.

In your calling as son or daughter eventually Jesus will ask you to give up everything. Be ready when He does. In your calling as husband and wife, Jesus will eventually ask you to give up everything. I know of spouses who have given up dreams that they had for their own lives for the sake of their spouse.

In your calling as workers Jesus will eventually ask that you give up everything. Be ready when this happens.

And any more nowadays in your calling as disciples of Jesus, He will ask you to give up more and more for His sake and eventually your own life. Whether that means a martyr's death or simply a life where you live it in a way that you did not wish to live it because of Jesus, give up your life you will.

And why not for even the incarnate God had a vocation laid upon Him. It was laid upon Him by His heavenly Father. And it cost Him His life. For all of the sins that we commit, the worst sins are the sins that we commit against our vocations. They are the ones that hurt the worst. They are the ones that shame us the worst. They are the ones that when they are committed against us hurt the worst. Therefore above all others these are the ones for which Christ gave up His life to forgive. And give up His life in His vocation He did.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.