

**February 16, 2020**  
**Follow Me!**  
**Matthew 4:18-22**

In 1986, a hot, dry summer led to a drop in the level of the Sea of Galilee. Moshe and Yuval Lufan, local fishermen, discovered the remains of an ancient boat buried in the mud. Quickly excavating the boat, before the water rose again, was an intense 12-day 12-night process. After it was removed it was submerged in a wax bath for 12 years to preserve it. Radiocarbon dating dated the boat to 40 BC; the evidence of repeated repairs shows the boat was used for several decades, perhaps nearly a century. This boat was actually used by fisherman on the Sea of Galilee at the time of Jesus. It's a reminder that people like Simon, Andrew, James, and John were real people, with real livelihoods, and real lives.

Then along comes Jesus ... *"As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew ... "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John ... Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him"* (Matthew 4:18-22).

Andrew and Simon/Peter had met Jesus before. Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist (John 1:40). On one occasion, when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, *"Look, the Lamb of God!"* The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, *"We have found the Messiah."* And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:35-42). But apparently Simon/Peter and Andrew had gone back to fishing. Until now.

What's different this time? What does Jesus' call "look" like? What does it mean for me?

***The Call: "Follow Me"***

One of the great gifts of the Christian life is this: no matter where we find ourselves, what we are working at, or what our circumstances, we have a vocation that has been given to us by God: we are called to be followers of Jesus Christ. Fundamentally that is who each of us is. ***Our primary calling, which we all share, is the call to love Jesus and serve Jesus and follow Jesus.*** You and I are God's beloved, called to follow Jesus.

We tend to think of calling or vocation in "job" terms: my occupation. For Jesus, our calling or vocation is to a way of life, actively living for and following Jesus. I met with a wise friend recently who said, *"My business work was my job; my career was teaching Bible Studies (for 61 years) and mentoring young men."* Thinking of vocation in THAT sense – in terms of serving Jesus – our specific job is less important than the spirit in which we do whatever job we happen to have. Potentially I can be a pastor and NOT really be living up to my vocation. Or I can be a dishwasher and be totally living up to my vocation.

That sense of vocation can transform how we see our jobs. Even the most boring and repetitive jobs can become Christian service if we are open to hearing the voice of God guiding and showing us how to use our gifts right where we are.

Nicholas Herman, better known as Brother Lawrence (1614-1691), was a lay brother at a Paris monastery. At 18 he came to faith in Jesus when saw a tree in the winter stripped of its leaves and thought how it would be renewed to life again in the spring. An uneducated former soldier ("a great awkward fellow who broke everything"), he worked in the monastery kitchen. His deep spirituality attracted people from all walks of life who came to learn from him; his wisdom was eventually collected in a book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

He emphasized that no matter where we are or what we are doing, (1) we are always in God's presence (*"We should establish ourselves in a sense of God's presence, by continually conversing with Him"*), (2) we can worship God by doing what we do well, whether it's baking bread, cleaning the floor, or writing a sermon. Knowing in his heart that he was a beloved child of God, a disciple of Jesus, Brother Lawrence took an ordinary, unglamorous job and infused it with all the joy, purpose, and dedication of a vocation that brought glory to God.

Nora Tubbs Tisdale, a professor at Yale Divinity School, writes of a woman she knew in New Orleans, who, after Hurricane Katrina, turned her bartending job into a ministry for Jesus as she simply listened to the painful stories people shared with her. I think of a business friend, who has shared the love of Jesus with countless people in the business community and in local politics, because of the connections he had – connections none of us pastors will ever have. Whatever we are doing, the potential exists to be an ambassador for Jesus. Wherever we are, we can love and serve and follow Jesus, simply by consistently living our faith.

### ***Callings come in all shapes and sizes***

Our common calling is to love and serve and follow Jesus. We sometimes limit the idea of vocation or calling to fulltime Christian "callings" like pastors or missionaries. But some of us feel called to be teachers, nurses, carpenters, businesspeople, homemakers, custodians, table servers, electricians, scientists, clerks ... That may be where our deepest desires lie, where are gifts and talents are, and what we want to do. That's wonderful! Or maybe that's just where we've "end up." That's OK, too. God calls people into all sorts of different vocations. God needs all sorts people in all sorts of places. None is more "spiritual" or "special" than another. After all, if everyone became a Bible professor or pastor, we'd have a dysfunctional world. And we would have a lot of people trying to do vocations that just don't fit.

God has created us each uniquely. Each of us has abilities, talents, skills, gifts, and sometimes those "deep desires of our heart" that suit us to specific tasks. Contentment and satisfaction come when we feel what we're doing is who God created us to be.

Sometimes we fulfil our vocation outside of a formal occupation, like my friend who led Bible studies for 61 years.

- Paula volunteers in the church nursery, coming at 9:15 instead of 10:59.
- Sam, a retiree, give over 20% of his income to his church, and THEN gives more to missions on top of that (forgoing the vacations and lifestyle he could enjoy).
- Jane volunteers cutting the grass at church (no one even knows she does it).

- Abe repairs tables and chairs and changes light bulbs.
- Zach helps out at the Soup Kitchen, Freda is involved with Days for Girls, Pat is one School Council, Angie reads for kids at the library, Irma visits in Lodges, Fred helps coach hockey, Joan goes to all her grandchildren's concerts and games ...

### ***How do I know what my calling is?***

"Vocation," writes Frederick Buechner, *"is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."* Finding that sense of vocation comes from listening. I need to listen to understand who God made me to be (gifts, talents, dreams). I need to listen to (good, godly, mature) Christian friends, who can help me discern how God is leading me. That sense of attentive listening is inherent in the word "vocation," rooted in the Latin for "voice."

Sometimes God calls people as suddenly and dramatically as He called Peter and Andrew, James and John. I recently met a woman who had a "significant experience" while visiting a Pentecostal church. *"The preacher,"* she said, *"was hammering the theme that God wants to bring to fruition the deepest desires of your heart, because he planted them there. I found myself considering deeply, what was the deepest desire of my heart? I had been a journalist and teacher of writing, and I was a new mother. The answer that popped into my head, clearly and surprisingly, was 'Bible professor.' I presented this potential call to my church community, they tested and confirmed it, and I enrolled in Seminary."* Studying part time for more than 12 years, she completed a master's and a PhD in biblical studies.

Sometimes God's call comes more slowly, but no less deliberately. I never wanted to be a pastor. I was doing a geography degree. But I had a vague sense I should pray about becoming a pastor. The pull, which began as a faint murmur, became a growing conviction I couldn't ignore. And so I tried things – leading a small group, helping with the youth group, leading worship ... sometimes we just need to try things out and see how they "fit" with us.

Nora Tubbs Tisdale comments, *"In his book Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation, Parker Palmer, writes about the fact that listening for and hearing God's voice is not always easy. During a dark and jobless period in his life when, as he puts it, 'I was approaching middle age at warp speed and had yet to find a vocational path that felt right,' he spent a number of months praying and trying to listen to God – yet with no audible voice to guide him. Finally in frustration he took his troubles to an older Quaker woman, well known for her thoughtfulness and candor. 'Ruth,' he said, 'People keep telling me that 'way will open.' Well, I sit in the silence, I pray, I listen for my calling, but way is not opening. I've been trying to find my vocation for a long time, and I still don't have the foggiest idea of what I'm meant to do.' Ruth's reply was a model of Quaker plain-speaking. She said somberly, 'In sixty-plus years of living, way has never opened in front of me.' But then she spoke again – this time with a grin. 'But a lot of way has closed behind me, and that's had the same guiding effect.'"*

### ***A grand adventure***

Note: Peter, Andrew, James and John have absolutely no idea what Jesus is calling them to.

- They have no idea what specific task Jesus is calling them to. Jesus makes an obtuse statement about sending them to fish for people. What does a carpenter know about fishing? What in the world does it mean to *"fish for people"*? They simply follow.
- They have no idea about the level of commitment, the time frame, or the change Jesus is calling them to. Is He calling them for an hour? A day? A week? A lifetime? He simply says, *"follow me."* And they follow.
- They have no idea what is going to happen to their business. Or whatever family they were supporting through their business. They probably didn't know. They just follow.

Did they have any idea Jesus would turn their lives upside down? That they would never be comfortable returning to this life again? That James would be executed by Herod Agrippa ("by the sword")? Peter and Andrew would be crucified? Only John (amongst all 12 of Jesus's disciples) would die a natural death? No, they didn't. Did Peter have any idea he would have a huge church in Rome dedicated to his memory? Did Andrew or James imagine whole countries would honour him as their patron saint (James – Spain; Andrew – Scotland, Russia, Romania, Ukraine, and Barbados). No, they didn't.

What did they see? They simply saw Jesus. That was enough. They were willing to take a first step with Jesus, not knowing where the path might lead. There would be great times. There would be hard times. There would be celebrations. There would be pain.

All of us have a vocation: to love and serve and follow Jesus. To keep our eyes on Jesus. *"You are the light of the world,"* says Jesus. *"A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16).

We are ALL called to be that light: at work, in school, in construction, in the Industrial Park, in Health Care, at the University, in our small businesses, at the College. We are ALL called to be that light: in our homes, to our family, in our neighbourhood. We are ALL called to be that light: through our volunteering, caring, giving, living for Jesus. What that looks like can change. For a season we may be working in one place or doing one thing. Then our circumstances can change, God closes ways and opens ways. That's all good.

We simply have this grand vocation: to love and serve and follow Jesus, wherever we are, whatever we're doing. There will be great times. There may be hard times. There will be celebrations. There may be pain. There's absolutely no promise that following it will earn us a life free of pain or difficulty. There is a promise that we will find a meaningful and fulfilling life. In the words of Brother Lawrence, *"Think often on God, by day, by night, in your business and even in your diversions. Leave him not alone. He is always near you and with you."* Try to keep your eyes on Jesus. Pray. Read. Listen. Try things out. That is enough.

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