

January 21, 2024

Your Call

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In my line of work, it's not uncommon for someone to ask me when I discerned my call to ministry

Whenever they do, I think of a scene from the movie "Sister Act" with Whoopie Goldberg, do you remember it?

She plays a lounge singer who is a witness to a crime and to protect her she is put in a witness protection program in a convent - she pretends to be a nun!

At one point in the movie, the other nuns surround Sister Mary Clarence and ask her the question so often I'm asked "when did you get your call?"

Having absolutely no clue what they're talking about, but not wanting to blow her cover, Sister Mary Clarence stumbles at first "what call" to which the other sisters look at her inquisitively "Oh the call! the call! I was working in Reno! And I got the call. And you don't know how hard it is to get a call until you've worked in Reno."

I have often told people that I, too, got the call when I was working in Reno.

Occasionally people get it, most often they just look at me puzzled to which I take great delight.

When did you get the call?

Today's gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus calling his first disciples, first Simon and Andrew, then James and John: "Follow me" he said – and they did.

They dropped everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus isn't the baby in the manger any more. And, he's not the small child visited by Magi from the East.

Jesus is now an adult with a ministry in his heart – baptized by John in the Jordan, claimed by God as the holy child to whom we should listen, tempted in the wilderness, and now a man with a mission and he needs help

Who does he turn to?

The greatest religious scholars of the day? No.

The great warriors? No.

Politicians? No.

Kings or Queens? No.

When Jesus calls his first disciples, who does he turn to? Mark tells us Simon and Andrew were fishermen, James and John, too, they were sitting in their boat mending their nets.

Fishermen.

Regular folk - not experts in religion, politics, or warfare; but experts in everyday life

The Rev. George E. Keck, a Lutheran pastor and writer once wrote that "For some it may be a scandal that God chose to use an earthen vessel - Jesus of Nazareth - as the vehicle for salvation."¹

¹ Keck, George E. "Mutual Ministry Committee: A Vision for Building Up the Body of Christ" published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America © 1994

Perhaps they'd be even more horrified that, "In turn, Jesus of Nazareth chose twelve persons - earthen vessels - for his disciples."

What was he thinking?

They often don't get it or they get in his way. They fall asleep when he asks them to stay awake. They encourage him to flee the crowds when it is exactly the crowds he has come to save. And one of them will even go so far as to betray him for a little bit of cash.

Jesus may have been better off with "Sister Mary Clarence" than with the disciples our gospels tell us he chose, at least she could have entertained the crowds with her singing

But it is precisely these earthen vessels - flaws and all – who Jesus chose as his companions and comrades, precisely these humble, simple humans who he called to be his disciples

It is precisely these earthen vessels to whom Jesus will hand the ministry when he dies, entrusting them with the good news of God's love and salvation when he is no longer able to proclaim it with his voice and earthly life

And to this day, as Rev. Keck writes, "God has entrusted the gospel to earthen vessels -- people like you and me"

As much as I joke about receiving my call when I was working in Reno, I absolutely know that a call has been placed upon my heart to do this ministry of priesthood, or as my Lutheran tradition calls it, the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

I know because no matter how often I dream of the luxuries that the salary of a professional basketball player could offer me, or knowing that I certainly wouldn't take work home with me if I were a trash collector, I can't

imagine doing anything else than what I get the privilege to do week in and week out – the privilege of serving as your priest in Christ's church

Telling my call story is a chance to reconnect with that time in my life - the surroundings, the people, the sense of closeness with God

Telling my call story, like telling the story of Jesus calling his disciples, is reminding myself that I don't need to be a religious scholar, warrior, politician or monarch – Jesus called me and continues to call me into his ministry of reconciliation and love just as I am

I could, and perhaps sometime I will, tell you the story of my calling

But, I don't want to lose sight of what I consider another meaningful aspect of Jesus calling fishermen to be his disciples – the fact that Jesus also calls you

You are also the earthen vessels of God's mission and ministry, and so I ask you: When did you discern your call?

You don't have to be a pastor or a priest to have a call story – you could be a fisherman!

You could be you – wholly and utterly you – earthen vessel you.

I believe there is a call upon your heart to discipleship because you're here!

For some, a Christian identity might have been something you grew up with and in a way you didn't choose it, but in another way you absolutely have chosen it by continuing to come, continuing to learn and grow in faith, continuing to serve

Continuing to question and wonder what it really means to you and to others to be called disciples of Jesus – to try to know what relevance faith has in your life and in the life of the world

When did you discern your call, or have you ever realized that you have a call?

It is yours, it is precious and I invite you to get to know it – notice and get to know the thing that tethers you to the Divine, that holds Jesus close to your heart and soul, the curiosity and calling that brings you into Christian community each weekend and which impacts how you are in the world each week

It is when we get to know this calling that we truly become evangelists!

Now, don't freak out at that word

Evangelist comes from the Greek word that in the gospel lesson today is translated as "good news" - yes, it's the same word that is the root of Evangelical and evangelism, and no it doesn't mean that you're all of a sudden Billy Graham or, ahem, Franklin Graham because I've called you an evangelist

They might also use that term, but what I mean is that when you get in touch with your calling, when you recognize that relationship between you and Jesus and how it pulls you into community, into service, into love, into mercy, into meaning-making and you start to understand the radical transformation of your person from being connected to that relationship, that community, that service, that love, that mercy, that meaning-making you now have a means for sharing this good, good news which has the power to radically transform, then, the world

You have been called – Jesus has come near to you and has called you to follow him, and you have listened

And naming that calling – that connection that draws you here and draws you to God – in whatever words come to you is an expression of discipleship I think the world needs to hear

So if calling you evangelists freaks you out, I won't – but you are called to be the earthen vessels of good, good news

Thanks be to God. Amen.