

Called into Community: Mark 1:14-20

Preached by The Rev. Anne Lemay, Dn, St. Luke's Gladstone, January 21, 2018

Spiritual writer and Episcopal priest Barbara Cawthorne Crafton's most recent book is entitled *Called*, and in it she shares stories of those who are called to the priesthood. She also shares the stories of those called to be an actor, a writer, a psychologist, a teacher, a waiter, a doctor - there is even a story about someone who is called to just pick up and leave.

What these stories all have in common is an excitement to be doing the work God has given them to do. A woman who works as a teacher shares that her first thought upon getting up is, "Ugh, I have to go to work", then seconds later starts to think about the day and begins to figure out how she's going to do this or that and she's already there, before even standing up from her bed." That's how you know you are doing what you are called to do. It feels right.

Have you ever met someone who brought such presence to their work that it radiated out to everyone nearby? Sometimes the most mundane task can be infused with such a joy of service.

I was in the hospital once, and feeling lonely because everyone in my family was at school or at work. A man came in pushing a mop, cleaning the floors, and greeted me jovially. His name in Spanish was the same as that of a famous singer, and he chatted about that for a few minutes. It was a short conversation - less than ten minutes - but it brightened my day. That man did so much more than clean my floor - I still remember the encounter twenty years later. Sometimes it isn't the task itself that is the calling - sometimes it's what we bring to it.

That reminds me of one of my deacon classmates, whom I will call John. John's job was servicing copy machines. He would show up at each job site with his tools, wearing his Jesus ball cap and a huge smile on his face. Like my hospital floor-cleaning visitor, John would chat with the staff for a few minutes about anything and everything, leaving them with much more than a working copy machine. He was truly a deacon in the world. He died less than a year after our ordination, but I still carry this image of him bringing the hospitality of Christ into the world.

In truth, we are **all** called to what we do in life. Calling is not a term reserved strictly for those called into ordained ministry, and sometimes God calls us into situations or out of them.

The story of Jesus calling his first disciples that we heard in Mark's Gospel today is short. There isn't much detail.

Jesus is walking along the beach, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He sees two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a net into the sea, and he calls out to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. A little farther on, they came upon two more brothers, James and John, who were in the boat mending their nets. He called them and they left their father in the boat with the hired men and followed Jesus.

The catalyst that pushed Jesus into beginning his ministry is hearing that John the Baptist had been handed over to the authorities to almost certain death. With that news, Jesus knew what he was called by God to do, and so he picks up where John left off, proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, but he is called to do more than fulfill John's ministry. Where John worked primarily alone, Jesus knew that he would need a community.

In fact, a look at the other Gospels shows us that this community had already begun. Calling Simon and Andrew and James and John wasn't a random choice. In his Gospel, John writes of a time when two disciples were with John the Baptist when Jesus happened to walk nearby. "Look," John told them, "here is the Lamb of God."

The two disciples were curious and so they began to walk behind Jesus, who stopped and asked them, "What are you looking for?" They asked where Jesus was staying, and Jesus invited them to come and see. One of those disciples was Andrew, who went to get his brother Simon. Reading between the lines, we can guess that the other disciple may well have been James or John, who also went to get his brother. It was four in the afternoon, and their day's work as fishermen was ended, and so they spent much of the night talking with Jesus in the place where he was staying.

So we know from the Gospel of John that the choice of these four called to be his first disciples was a very deliberate choice. Jesus knew who they were and where they worked.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus is being followed by a crowd that is pressing in on him, so he gets into Simon's boat and teaches them from that vantage point before telling Simon to cast out his nets. Simon protests that they had been fishing all night and caught nothing, yet when he does as Jesus asks, the net is full to bursting with fish. Simon has witnessed a miracle. The same miracle that Gospel writer John describes at the very end of his Gospel is here in Luke's at the very beginning of Jesus's ministry. And so Simon leaves it all to follow Jesus. John's Gospel also tells us how, that same day, Jesus found Philip and Nathaniel.

The truth is that Jesus knew who he was calling as his disciples, and there are many more than are named in these stories. We know, of course, that he called the Twelve, but there were always crowds around Jesus. Some followed him on his journeys and some stayed where they had always lived and went to hear him whenever he was in town, and his followers included many women as well as men. They included people from all walks of life, and Jesus came to them where they were in their everyday lives, calling them into a community of God-seekers.

And that's what we are: A community of God-seekers. We are called into community to seek God together, not on our own. We are not called to be the heroes, like Superman or Mighty Mouse, to come and save the day and win souls for Jesus all on our own. We are called to work *together*, to learn *together*, to grow *together*, to seek and serve God in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves - *together*. We are called to be a team.

We can have more than one calling at the same time: Deacons are an example of that, called to work in the world as well as to serve in the church, but isn't that what lay people do all the time? You serve in the church and you serve Christ in the world as you go about your everyday lives.

I can speak to that in my job in the world as a librarian and supervisor: Perhaps my work place is not so different from yours. I am called not only to serve the children and families who come to us, but also to serve my staff - there are sixteen of us now, including me. Most of them are part time. Some have other jobs. Some of them are retired. One was actually my boss in another library before her retirement! One is a high school student, one is in college, one is newly married, four of us worked together in the past in a different library system, one is a storytelling colleague from way back, two of us are also certified teachers, some of us were born in the United States and some were not. Some speak two or three languages, like Turkish and Arabic and Farsi and American Sign Language and some have only English, perhaps with a smattering of French or Spanish ... we are a diverse group in every way.

Most important, we are a team. Together, we are stronger than any one of us is alone. Regardless of too many deadlines and too much to accomplish mixed in with the usual "drop everything and deal with this NOW" surprises that occur in every type of job, there is a confidence in this work team - we have developed a rhythm that works and are able to step in at a moment's notice when needed. What kinds of problems can develop in a library, you might ask? People think of libraries as safe places where very little happens. Don't they just sit around and read books all day? In truth, it's as public as the shopping mall or the train station, and my library is used by people from all over the world who have different customs and often different languages. Ours is a ministry of hospitality, welcoming the stranger as we who are Episcopalian Christians would welcome Christ. I find that to be a universal truth, regardless of the individual beliefs of

the staff or the patrons. Welcoming strangers is universal and we work together to do it, Christian and Jew and Hindu and Muslim and Agnostic alike.

There's a reason Jesus called more than one disciple - for we don't do this alone. We don't do anything alone. All work requires community, a team of leaders who rotate their turns in the dance. We may get ideas on our own, but we plan together, and serve together. We are a team, at the library, on the Board of Directors, in finance or communications or the pharmaceutical industry or on a sheep farm, in the home: wherever we work, we encounter others and we serve others.

We are called to bring the hospitality of Christ into everything that we do. We have more than just one calling: We are called to the work that God has given us to do in our everyday lives and we are called into relationships with others in our communities of family, job, church.

Some of us are called to serve as volunteers in the world, at hospitals, in schools, or animal shelters or soup kitchens or at the VNA Rummage Sale. We are called to our hobbies of art and reading and golf and skiing and pottery that not only relax us and fill us but also provide opportunities for community and for welcome. We are called into relationship and out of relationship, and no matter what we do or who we are, we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons - *all* persons - respecting the dignity of every human being, bringing the hospitality of Christ out into the world. We God-seekers are called by Christ to serve others in everything that we do. Together, we are better than any one of us is alone.
