

Title: The Call of the First Disciples

Subtitle: Discerning a call from God

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/RX79oUo7TVQ>

Our Gospel today describes the calling of the first disciples. In fact, the notion of being called or being set apart is found in all four readings from scripture today. The idea of being “called” is a theological term that refers to God’s choice to bring redemption to individuals who, in turn, will share that blessing with others. Such participation requires personal discernment, confirmation, and encouragement.

But Paul makes it clear in the opening of his letter to the Corinthians today that every Christian is “*called to be a saint*.”¹ That exact phrase can also be translated; we are “*called to be holy*”² because a saint is someone who is “set apart” for God. In this calling, God claims us as his own and sets us apart for a particular purpose. Such a calling is heavenly and spiritual, yet it meets us where we are in all our humanness.

The journey begins for each of us much as it did for the first disciples who “*Behold the Lamb of God, who comes to take away the sins of the world.*”³ It is by beholding him that we are drawn to him and want to be with him.

When Jesus saw this, he turned around and asked, “*What do you want?*”⁴ This phrase happens to be the first spoken by Jesus in John’s Gospel. His question intrinsically implies that the call of God is a soul-searching adventure that initially begins with an inner hunger.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:2

² Strong’s Concordance, #40 (hag'-ee-os) **Definition:** sacred, holy. **Usage:** set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred

³ John 1:29

⁴ John 1:38

So let's pause and explore this aspect of what it means to "be called" more deeply because asking what you are looking for is essential. For years, I had no idea what I was looking for. If you asked me what I wanted, the only answer I could give is that I wanted to be happy. There was a desire for life as it was meant to be, and even though it seemed unattainable, something kept drawing me.

If you think about it, these two disciples would not have followed John the Baptist if that was not the case. Life, as it was meant to be, is filled with relationships. **We were made by God and for God.** As a result, there is an internal homing device riveted deep within our souls that perpetually long for our Maker—an internal God-ward magnet, pulling our being toward Him.”⁵ And that is why the disciples asked Jesus where he was staying because they just wanted to be with him. And the word they used to express this desire is a favorite one used in John's Gospel because it is the same word used to describe a place of intimacy. To *'remain'* or *'abide'* where Jesus lived is the home they sought and wanted. Living in and with him was the key to finding their heart's desire, their promised land. And to their question, Jesus says, ***“Come, and you will see.”***⁶

Dietrick Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran Pastor who was active in his resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism and later lost his life in a concentration camp, reflected upon this call to ***“come and see”*** in his book ***“[The Cost of Discipleship](#).”*** In it, he asks:

“If we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand?” In answering

⁵ Louie Giglio, “The Air I Breathe,” p. 13-14

⁶ John 1:39

that question, he wrote: “We shall have to go to him, for only he knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey’s end.”

In Bonhoeffer’s role as a pastor, many people came to him and asked him what they should do, as the Nazi regime was constantly knocking on their doors and asking questions. On one such occasion, he said, “I cannot tell you what to do, but I can tell you who you are.” In this respect, it is crucial to notice that Jesus does not, first or primarily, call us to do a particular job or to fill a specific role. Our call as Christians is not initially for us to work but to abide in him. The fruit of that relationship is servanthood, but it all starts with being with him and abiding in him. Isaiah talks about Israel “*being made like a polished arrow.*”⁷ In Christ, we, too, are given a marvelous purpose. We, too, have “*been formed in the womb to be his servant.*”⁸ Jesus said, “*You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that you should go and bring forth fruit—fruit that will last.*”⁹

Martin Luther King, Jr was one of those servants, and his life shows us that the call to faith is not a call to luxury but a rugged journey. Dr. King said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where a man stands during comforts and conveniences, but rather where he stands during challenges and controversy.”¹⁰

In Walt Disney’s movie, “**Frozen II**,” the words of its theme song, “**Into the Unknown**,” also expresses this sentiment. That song, nominated for an Academy Award, describes the drama in one’s soul as a person feels strangely

⁷ Isaiah 49:2

⁸ Isaiah 49:5

⁹ John 15:16

¹⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love, p. 25 - (1963)

called to venture into the unknown. In one of the verses, the princess declares:

I am afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you.
...Every day's a little harder as I feel my power grow
Don't you know there's part of me that longs to go
Into the unknown, into the unknown.

Then, just before the adventure begins, she sings:

Are you out there?
Do you know me?
Can you feel me?
Can you show me?

And we can only find the answers to those questions as we follow the Gospel's invitation "***to come and see.***"

The Christian journey has never been a promise to comfort and ease. On the contrary, the adventure of the Christian life is filled with many challenges. There are "many dangers, toils, and snares," as the hymn writer expressed it. But if we respond to the call, we will discover from first-hand experience that the one in whom we have put our trust is reliable, for "***whoever follows me*** (as Jesus has said) ***will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.***"¹¹ That light, when once discovered and experienced, is so contagious that we can't help but want to share it with others. And just as Andrew brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Christ, we are also given the privilege of inviting others to "***come and see.***" Come and see the one who takes away our sins and invites us into the abundance of finding, seeking, and telling others about him.

¹¹ John 8:12

Let's pray: Lord, help us to "shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that you might be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth."¹² Amen.

¹² Words from opening collect for Epiphany 2, BCP, p. 215