

IT'S YOUR CALL
Mark 1:14-20
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, January 22, 2012

The other day after reconnecting with a college friend I haven't seen in almost forty years suddenly I found myself thinking some curious thoughts that could be best summed up by the question, "How did I get here?"

Did you ever ask yourself that, wondering why you live where you live and work where you work? You may also wonder, "...ten, twenty, thirty years ago, would I have ever imagined I'd be living at my current address, working where I work and worshipping where I worship?"

I ask myself, "How did this happen? How did I end up being a Presbyterian when I was born Catholic, and a preacher when I started out being a teacher? How is it I ended up being a Christian and not an agnostic or atheist?"

Deep down I know God has a lot to do with my station in life, God was always behind the scenes, orchestrating opportunities and giving me choices as I made the key decisions of my life. Simply put, I believe God was always calling me to become who I am today. Does that mean the skies opened up, flooding me with beams of light as a voice called down, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased?" No, nothing that dramatic. Even so, I'm convinced, for whatever reason, God wanted me to go to seminary and become a pastor. God called the shots and I willingly went along for the ride.

I know skeptics will claim I ended up where I am due to a series of mishaps, or because I deluded myself into thinking it was God's will. I can only answer because I believe in God I don't see life as a series of random accidents.

Instead, in ways far beyond me, God works out his purposes by giving us choices that can lead to us becoming who God wants us to become and doing what God wants us to do or not. But even when we resist cooperating with God, even undermining God's will, God still has the upper hand and one way or another God's will is done. To prove my point, let Good Friday and Easter morning be entered as Exhibit "A".

My own personal experience informs me that when I resist God's will I end up frustrated, but when I cooperate I'm reaffirmed. I don't mean everything always goes smoothly. There're still disruptions and disappointments, false starts and dead ends, even times to be afraid and angry. But I'm convinced that whenever anyone answers God's call to stand up against the world, even if you get hurt and suffer, God still honors you for daring to be Christ-like.

Today's sermon title asks, "What does it mean to be called?" Let's begin with this: ministers and priests aren't the only ones called by God. I said several weeks ago your baptism is your ordination to discipleship. If you can confirm the promises made on your behalf at your baptism, you're ordained to the servant lifestyle. In other words, if it's your desire to commit yourself to being a follower of Jesus, and live accordingly, you've answered the call.

Still, what does "being called" mean in a practical sense? It should mean you've separated yourself from the world system to, quite frankly, subvert the world system and instead promote God's Kingdom because you realize the world system is going the way of the dinosaur. Even so, despite the odds, the world system is determined to survive even if it finds itself opposing everything good, acceptable and perfect.

So, being "called out" has a subversive ring to it. In a very real sense we're called to undermine anything opposing Christ's Gospel of justice and love. Interesting "fun fact": the Greek word for church is "ekklesia." It has its root in the verb "to call out." The word church then, literally means, "the ones called out."

Do you remember the Exodus story? God called the Hebrew's out of slavery into freedom. More than social and political freedom, they were given the choice between being God's Chosen People or remain cogs in the world system. They enthusiastically chose freedom, until they had to count the cost. Remember their trials and tribulations as they wandered aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years? God knew they weren't ready to experience freedom; they still had to shed their slave mentality before they could appreciate freedom. Isn't their story our story?

But like his relationship with them God won't give us up either. Despite our rejections, God patiently waits for us to come to our senses and submit to God's demands.

We call the process of submitting to God "transformation." Remember? "...do not be conformed to this world by the renewal of your mind so you may know the will of God..." (Romans 12:1)

But transformation isn't about changing yourself. Only God can change you but only you can let it happen. That's why very few of us experience instantaneous change.

Take the 12 disciples as prime examples. The longer Jesus spent time with them, the more he got frustrated. Peter remained an impulsive hot head, James and John harbored secret ambitions; all of them argued about who was the greatest and all of them abandoned Jesus at the first sign of danger. And yet when you get to the Book of Acts you discover these very same self-important little men were finally transformed into spirit-led leaders. Did they change themselves? If we could bring them all back and stand them here in front of us to tell their stories, each would say, "I was changed by the grace of God. Jesus called me and the Holy Spirit empowered me and only because I

stayed with Jesus did I become like Jesus. If I did change for the better, God did the all the changing.”

Even after having said all this, the question, “What does it mean to be called?” isn’t fully answered until we realize answering God’s call means accepting the invitation to live in the same world in a different way.

Back in the 90’s the terms “paradigm” and “paradigm shift” became popular. A paradigm is a set of assumptions that forms a society’s world view. Everything we know and believe to be true is the paradigm for families, communities and society.

A Paradigm Shift happens when our world view is no longer seen as being true or relevant so the old paradigm must go through a shift or transformation. Case in point: when Columbus returned from discovering the New World everything changed, because people now knew the world wasn’t flat, so people had to live in the same world in a different way.

Another example: Susan and I lived in Loch Raven Village since the time we were married. But when we came to Babcock and moved from across the boulevard into the manse, we still lived in the same neighborhood, but we had to live in a different way. When we went to the store or took Elisabeth to school or went off to work, we had to think twice and plot new routes because we were now coming and going from a different place.

Likewise, when you accept Jesus’ call to discipleship you have to learn how to live in the same world in a different way. How you spend your time and money, how you treat people, your personal and professional ethic all need to change. You have to think twice and figure out new routes because now you’re coming and going from a different place.

One more thing, when you answer the call to discipleship and take on the servant lifestyle, you find yourself putting Christ and his Kingdom first in your priorities. Every day in every way you’re invited to deny yourself, and pick up your cross, that is, you deny yourself anything that keeps you from giving yourself to God and you take on any sacrifice God is asking you to make.

Of course if your discipleship is going to take root and grow, being in Christian Community is one of the essentials to the Christian/servant lifestyle. We come to realize how much we need each other so we can grow with each other, when we worship together, search the scriptures and pray together and when we love and serve together.

Immediately after worship you’re all invited to come downstairs for brunch, and our annual meeting. More than being a meeting to conduct the business of the church, it’s a time to celebrate our life together and our calling to be part of something bigger than ourselves, by being enveloped by the mystery of our baptism into Christ and

claiming both the privileges and responsibilities of being God's sons and daughters and Christ's brothers and sisters.

May God continue to bless us with affirmation and power so we together can make and be the difference in our corner of God's Kingdom.