

You Have A Call

A sermon by David A. Roquemore
First Presbyterian Church, Newton NC
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John 1: 43-51

You have a call. How often have you heard those words? You have a call from home, from the boss, from your kids, from the IRS. You have a call. A call from an old friend delights us. Sometimes a call is good news; sometimes, life-changing bad news. Most times, just more information. You have a call.

In this passage we read of Jesus calling his disciples. A few verses earlier, he met Andrew, who brought his brother Simon Peter. Then Jesus finds Philip, who in turn brings his friend Nathanael. Nathanael is skeptical that anyone worth hearing comes from Nazareth, but when he meets Jesus, and Jesus already knows him through and through, he becomes a dedicated follower. All of these men follow Jesus when he calls – they sense something about him that leaves them willing to forsake everything else.

You have a call. Jesus is calling you. Did you know that? All of us have a general call. There is a call for each of us to follow Jesus and obey him, to be devoted and committed to him. You have a call – how are you responding?

We say things sometimes like, “remember all that Jesus has done for us.” We are asked to give or serve “in thanksgiving for all that Christ has given us, or done for us.” When that is said, what would happen if I yelled, “Pop Quiz!” and asked you to detail what that means. What does it mean to say “all that Christ has done?” What are we talking about?

God calls all people. The whole plan of God is to bring humanity back into loving fellowship with God. The ancient church said it this way: he became as we are, so that we may become as he is. We will never be God, never divine, but God would glorify us. God would draw us as close to him as possible. God the Son became a man so that men and women can become true children of God. That is what the call of God is all about!

To do that, first he must redeem us. He must get us out of this mudhole of sin we are trapped in. He must heal us of this disease. Sin shouldn’t be taken lightly – it is a disease, and leads in every case to death. There is no way out of here alive, and the death sin brings is spiritual death.

There is only one cure for the disease: Jesus. Jesus took our humanity and died.. And then he brought it out of the grave with him. He was raised, and we are raised with him. Read the first twelve verses of Romans 6 carefully and you will see St. Paul explain this, in relation to baptism. We have died with Christ, and so we will live with him. The disease is cured by his death and resurrection.

That is what Jesus has done for us. That is why we gather, why we sing his praises. That is why we tell the story over and over. That is why we come to his table to be fed – not often enough, if you ask me, but we do it in his memory. He feeds us, strengthens us.

That is what Jesus has done, and so what are we supposed to do? We have a general call, I said, all of us. There is a call from God for his creatures to respond in love and praise and obedience. Then there is the special call that each of us has, the particular way that God expects us to obey. There is a general pattern and expectation, but the details will be different for each of us.

You see, when we are called, when we are saved from this disease, there is still a lot wrong with us, a lot that needs to be corrected. The effects of the disease must be removed from us, and healthy ways of living must be learned. The Spirit begins to work on us, and change us. Our obedience to God's call is that learning process at work in us.

The basic move in this discipleship, the basic thing we have to learn is this: we are not the center of our universes, Christ is. Christ is the One who matters; we do not. I must decrease, Paul says, so that he may increase. Putting him before our own selfish tendencies is the key, and it takes most of a lifetime to do it consistently.

When we put Christ first, he becomes the leader. That is what follower means: he tells these disciples, follow me. He is the leader, of our lives, of all of our lives, every aspect of life. He is the leader of every aspect of it, and leads us for his glory not our own, his purposes, not our own; his agenda, not our own. He does not lead us so that we will have our every whim catered to or our every preference enacted; there are no entitlements in the kingdom of God. We see all of these politicians angling for a job, hoping to get elected, based on their ideas or accomplishments. God doesn't work that way.

What happens when we put Christ first is that our other priorities fall into line. Not everything will be perfect, or easy, but we will see things change. We become converted, some more slowly than others. We learn to be humble, to love others, to serve selflessly. Those can be pretty hard lessons, but we learn them from the Holy Spirit; little by little we are changed.

In Philippians 2, Paul says for us to have the mind of Christ: to begin to think about things from God's perspective, to see the world as Christ does, to change and be changed by the Spirit so that our thinking changes. When I was a student, I would meet people, and frequently, when I said I was studying philosophy, they would ask, "doesn't that mess up your mind?" No, when you study something critically, you can sort out the good from the bad. It is the things that come in uncritically that affect us greatly, that mess up our minds. We are swayed by influences that come at us from all directions, and over the course of a few decades, what had been far out of bounds seems, well, OK. God calls us to have the mind of Christ.

Did you ever watch a football game on television? Or course you have! Perhaps you have even braved the cold see a game in person. A lot of energy and enthusiasm – what if we

had that kind of enthusiasm and energy not for our favorite team, but for the Lord! For God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Why don't we?

We have heard it all before, perhaps. We come to worship and, well, we have heard it all before. We may not take it too seriously, or we come with a bad attitude, or with no particular passion. In short, we need conversion. I believe our hearts need to be converted not just once, but constantly.

So whether this is the first time you have ever taken this seriously, or whether you have been a Christian disciple for many years, take this moment and make a commitment to follow Jesus. Make the commitment that this day, this week, from now on, you want to follow. Ask the Spirit to show you what needs to change in your life to make you a more faithful disciple and follower. Ask for the grace to change, and be changed. And together let us follow and bring Christ all the glory! You have a call!

Thanks be to God!
Amen.