

One day Andrew and Simon, James and John get up when the sky is still dark, walk down to the sea, and hurl nets into the water, anticipating a catch of fish. It is a day like so many other days. These men have engaged in this same routine hundreds of times before. This is what they do, for they are fishermen.

Amid familiar water and nets and fresh fish, rough wood of boats, rhythmic motion of waves, in the midst of this familiarity, for these four men, a beginning takes place.

Jesus turns up at the waterside. Have they met him before, heard about him? It does not matter. Today, as he calls them, a beginning takes place. He glances out at these working men with their nets and their hard-won catch, and announces in a voice almost comic, the way men kid one another, *“Follow me boys, and I will make you fish for people.”* How do the four hear this; as a put-down, a dare, a challenge from this landlubber on the shore? Is this an invitation for a job? Will they get paid? How much?

But Jesus isn't hiring, he's calling them to follow him on what will be the adventure of their lives. Like every call story in the Bible, this one is an adventure. An adventure is, by its nature, something that comes to us, something that chooses us. Something that captures our imagination and directs us on a new pathway.

What does it mean to be called by Christ? It is an interesting question because following right behind it is another question. What does it mean to respond to the call of Christ?

The concept of call is a very old concept and has been around since the beginning of time when God first called humanity into being. The call of God has been heard over and over again across the aeons of time.

Abraham was an old man when he heard the call of God to be the father of a new nation. God wrestled with Jacob and called him giving him a new name, Israel. God called Joseph in a dream. God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage into a new land. At Mount Sinai God entered into covenant with Israel and called the people of Israel to be a unique and chosen nation. Later in their history God called upon a shepherd named David to lead Israel and be their king. Throughout their history God called the prophets forth to proclaim God's word in their midst. And what a word it was. A word that condemned, that passed judgement, forgave, and offered encouragement and hope and a vision for a better tomorrow, and a promised messiah.

In the New Testament we read of God's call to Elizabeth to bear a son and name him John. God called Mary to bear a son and call him Jesus. Jesus himself called fishermen, and tax collectors, men and women from all walks of life to follow him. While on the road to Damascus a Pharisee named Paul who while on his way to arrest and kill Christians heard the call of Jesus to become an apostle and evangelist for Christ.

Paul writes that God calls Christians to be a church. According to Paul God calls believers to communion with Christ, to peace, to one hope in Christ, and to eternal life. In fact Paul says, we are daily called by God to the task of being a Christian.

It is truly fascinating and wonderful when you think about it for a moment. It is fascinating and wonderful to read the Bible and discover that the story of our faith is a story of God acting in the lives of everyday ordinary people and calling men and women into ministry. The fact is that in the Bible God calls people to share in the work of God's ministry. God does not work alone but works with us. It has been said that without God nothing is possible but without us God won't.

In the church the stole is the symbol of ministry and recognizes that an individual has been chosen and called into ministry. When I was ordained my home congregation Ebenezer United gave me a stole as a sign of my call into ministry. When people are elected in the church to high office such as Conference President or Moderator they are presented with a stole to symbolize their call to that specific ministry. Perhaps we should give stoles to all who serve the church because each one of you have been called into ministry. You have God given spiritual gifts which are given to you to be used in God's ministry. Each of you have gifts and they are meant to be used in doing ministry.

The reason that BNUC is able to do ministry is because people, ordinary people like you have responded to that call and served the ministry in various capacities. Over many years you have offered your financial support and your talents. Today in this sanctuary are sitting people with the gifts and abilities to serve on the pastoral care team, the Ministry and Personnel team, the Finance Committee and be the Presbytery representative for BNUC. As well there are people here who can be greeters and ushers. There are people here whose voice would be a great addition to the choir. There are people here who have the gift of hospitality and could serve by signing up for the coffee time and fellowship meals we have after services. So I look forward to receiving an overwhelming list of people responding to the nominations report that I emailed and gave out to the congregation.

God wants humanity to be a part of the fulfilment of God's kingdom. When Jesus called his first disciples Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him, he was reaching out to humanity and including humanity in the ministry that he was about to embark upon. These men were not well educated religious leaders primed and ready to be leaders of a religious movement that would eventually span the globe. These were not men who had specific training and preparation to preach and spread God's good news. No, they were simple everyday ordinary folk, fishermen, who knew what a hard day's work meant. They worked from dawn to dusk fishing, mending their nets, and cleaning the fish. Yes, these were ordinary men, and the only thing that they had to offer Jesus was who they were and that was exactly what Jesus was looking for, ordinary people who would give him themselves.

God calls ordinary people to do God's work in this world. I remember the day that I heard the call to the ordered ministry. It was quite simple really. Rev. Vince Alfano, who was my minister at the time was helping me sort out some life issues simply asked the question, "*Have you considered ministry?*" Well the rest is as they say history and twenty-seven years later as I prepare for my retirement and look back I can truthfully say it's been an amazing ride. What God has planned for me after June 30th is yet to be discovered but I know whatever it is it will be an adventure.

I was not expecting the call but then neither are most people who hear God's call in their lives. Jesus does not encounter people necessarily in some special religious sphere, but in the midst of everyday life where they really live. This is how God encountered David while he tended his sheep, and Moses while he was fleeing for his life, and Mary as she was preparing for her marriage to Joseph, and Peter while he was mending the nets, and Paul while he was on his way to kill more Christians and so many others over the centuries.

When the call of God comes it is powerful and when we hear it we know. Responding to that call is not always easy because it often requires walking into the unknown. It may require letting go of the familiar and the comfortable and walking by faith.

So how will we as a community respond to God's call to this ministry here at BNUC? How will each of us as individuals respond to God's call?
(PAUSE)...

Thanks be to God. Amen.