

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for June 7, 2027 Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 9:9-13 - "What's Your Call Story?"

I come to you this morning in the name of Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.

How did you end up here? What's your call story?

During the process of seeking ordination, you spend a lot of time think about these questions. It's a very important step on the path to ministry. As Christians, we may not think about it in those terms necessarily, but the call remains one of Christianity's identifying features. Why are you following Jesus Christ? How did Christ call you? Why do you continue to be a disciple of Christ? Why do you have faith in God?

God calls us in the most unusual, unexpected, and exciting ways. This morning, we heard about two guys receiving their call.

First, we have Abram, a 75-year-old man, married to Sarai, and who have unfortunately been childless. Abram receives a divine commission to leave his family and go where God sends him. Abram is not a young man, and journeying off across the desert probably wasn't high on his bucket list. But, as far as we can tell from the text, Abram and Sarai pack themselves up, grab Lot, and head off. Abram's faith in God was so strong, that he simply trusted God knew what God was asking of them. Abram heard God's call, listened to it, and followed it.

There is a bit of a snag, though. God's call to Abram was to "make of you a great nation." How is a nomadic man of advanced years with a barren wife supposed to create a great nation? Seems like an odd calling, don't you think? Well, I'm sure God knows what's best. Let's check out the other calling being made this morning.

In the Gospel, we have Jesus, walking along down the street, minding his own business, when he sees a man sitting at a tax-collecting station. By all appearances this was a "chance encounter." Jesus had just finished delivering a message to a large crowd that had followed him to the lakeside, so he was probably trying to steal some time alone in quiet contemplation. Or maybe he was on his way to his next preaching stop. All the scriptures tell us is that Jesus was walking and he saw this man. Doesn't seem to be anything special about Matthew. Just a junior clerk in the Roman equivalent of Canada Customs, going about his daily business of collecting taxes from those who were transporting goods along the road that Jesus happened to be travelling.

Jesus simply says, "follow me" and up Matthew got and followed him. Just like that. Matthew gets up, leaves behind his tax collector status, and becomes a disciple of Christ. His response is immediate and total. No questions asked, as far as we can tell. And, really Jesus? A tax collector? Seems like an odd calling, don't you think?

If you were to go through the bible and find all the passages that tell us about people called by God and Jesus, none of them are people you would expect to be called, and, while some of them fight it in the beginning, many of them answer the call without question. Just drop their whole lives and walk away.

Matthew's story is an excellent example of the unexpected person being called into discipleship. A tax collector was ostracized, socially despised, and corrupt. They were considered to be collaborating with the Romans to make their fellow Jews even more submissive to the Empire than they already were. And they had a reputation of being dishonest, as they tended to charge more than required and would keep the difference for themselves. So being a tax collector, Matthew doesn't seem like the kind of guy we picture Jesus calling to spread the good news of the kingdom.

However, the healthy and wealthy were, and are, not the ones at the centre of Jesus' ministry. Jesus tells us that healthy people aren't the ones in need of a doctor, the sick ones are. These are the people with whom Jesus dined that night, and invited Matthew to join him at the table. Given his background, Matthew would have blended in nicely with the rest of the social and moral outcasts. And maybe that's what Jesus saw in Matthew – someone who could bridge the gap between the marginalized and the Saviour. Perhaps Matthew was called to spread the gospel because those at the bottom may be more likely to listen to someone sitting at the bottom with them. The divine kingdom welcomes social outcasts like Matthew, and he was chosen to be a public example of that inclusivity.

Jesus calls these outcasts to have a meal with him; he invites them to the table, to the intimate relationship of sharing food. While others question Jesus' choice in dinner company and discipleship, Jesus knows exactly what he's doing. Jesus knows exactly who he is here for. He is not here for those who use scripture and the law to secure righteousness for themselves, but for those who admit that they don't know where to even begin or if they should begin at all. Jesus is not waiting for us to become worthy, well-studied, and perfectly religious. Jesus meets us where we are, just as we are. In mercy God invites us all to trust that we are not called because we are ready but because, in Jesus, God's salvation comes near.

Like Mathew, we can choose to follow Christ. Like Abraham, we can live into the promise of God in faith. Each day we make decisions about our life. And we always have the choice to follow Christ, live a life of love, and trust that God is in full control of the situation when the unexpected people are called into discipleship.

And there is no one definitive way to answer God's call, no one way to follow Christ, because there is no one call for everyone, but one unique call for each of us. God knows us better than we know ourselves, knows our potential, knows our gifts, and knows our weaknesses. Though we may not know what we might have to offer, God has unwavering faith in us, and all we need to do is answer the call, doing nothing more than bringing what we have.

So open your hearts and minds and ponder the questions once more – How did you get here? What is your story? At coffee time, I invite you to share your story with someone or ask other people to describe their story to you. While you are sharing stories, remember these words – God loves you, each and every one, exactly as you are, without reservation, more than you can ask or begin to imagine.

And that is good news indeed.

Amen.