

Denice K. Leslie  
January 27, 2008  
Epiphany 3  
Matthew 4: 12 – 23

## Good News! WE Are Called!

### *Unexpected Call:*

A couple of weeks before Christmas, an elderly man in Phoenix telephoned his adult son in New York.

He said, "Son, your mother and I have been married for 40 years, and I just wanted to call and tell you that we've decided to get a divorce."

His son was aghast. He said, "Dad, that's terrible! Don't you and Mother do a thing until I've had a chance to come and talk to you. I'll be on the next plane to Phoenix!"

They hung up, and the son called his sister in Chicago. He said, "Sis, Dad just called. He told me that he and Mom are getting a divorce."

His sister said, "I'll meet you in Phoenix, and we'll talk some sense into them."

She hung up and immediately telephoned her father. She said, "Dad, Don't you do a thing until I've had a chance to talk with you. I'll be on the next plane to Phoenix."

Her father hung up, turned to his wife, and said, "Honey, both kids are going to be home for Christmas, and they're paying their own way!"<sup>1</sup>

*(Cell phone rings. Act embarrassed. Scramble to locate it-fumble a bit, look at who is calling, answer it and after a moment or two say, "Yes? Yes! Yes!!" And hurry down the aisle and out the door holding the phone to your ear and ignoring everyone. Wait a moment. Then return to the sanctuary and go back to the pulpit and pray the Good Lord no one is miffed enough to call the DS or the SPRC chair or never return to worship!):*

Would you believe me if I said that was God calling? I didn't think so.

But now that I have your attention, have you ever received a call that you just could not ignore?

It feels like people do all the time! There is this compulsion to answer the phone.

And Cell phones are ubiquitous.

Everywhere!

Mine is with me 24/7

That means my life is on call.

I can control it-there's a button for volume—up, down, vibrate only, no sounds.

But if I do cut off the sound completely I don't know if someone is calling— So I willingly permit this little electronic device to control my life to a great degree.

But I obviously can't answer it ALL the time—there are times and places where you don't respond to a call

Restaurants, meetings, counseling sessions, sleeping, bathing—you get the picture.

Yet my dedication to it is remarkable.

### *A Sense of Urgency*

Most of the time if it rings I will answer it.

And I'm not alone. No matter whatever else is going on in society these days, the cell phone seems to get our immediate attention. To take priority over whatever else is going on or whoever else we are with,

Someone is having a conversation with a group of friends and will interrupt the conversation to take a call!!

The cell phone has turned etiquette on its head! And everyone tolerates it! There seems to be this tacit agreement that a phone call necessitates a sense of urgency that can not, must not, be ignored.

In spite of the fact that we ALL have phone answering machines and voice mail—

<sup>1</sup> Homiletics illustrations.

there is still this sense of urgency about answering a telephone call.

### *Answering the Call*

Jesus is walking along by the Sea of Galilee while fisher folk are about their daily occupation—I mean this is serious stuff. What they do puts food on the table. This isn't a day's outing for recreation.

As they are casting their nets into the sea; while they are intent on repairing their equipment Jesus calls them.

They flip open their cell phones, listen and dash away ---without hesitation they all answer the call.

Jesus' timing seems a little off. Kind of like my cell phone going off in the middle of worship. But we don't hear a murmur from old Zebedee, do we? He apparently accepts the fact that this is an urgent call—not to be denied.

### *Jesus' Call In/to Real Life*

What could possibly be so important that excuses this kind of interruption?

Just possibly everything but the status quo. Just possibly the Kingdom of God.

Not that these men don't continue to fish. They don't give up fishing. Jesus says, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people."

Now, however, they do their fishing from the perspective of Jesus' call—Jesus' claim on their lives.

And that is Jesus' call to us—not to give up our real lives but to be real in life.

Not to call us out of life but into life.

Jesus' calls us to be who we were created to be. To embrace the me God has made and God loves. I am a child of God. You are a child of God.

Jesus calls you to follow him as you are. In the midst of the real circumstances of your life.

These fisher men were not seminary educated folks. They were not ordained pastors.

They simply gave themselves over to the leading of God for their lives.

### *Called to live for the Kingdom*

When they did that Jesus showed them the way to be about God's business, to see the world from God's perspective. To act on different values—There is the value of prospering a fishing business.

But Jesus' enlarges their vision to one of prospering all of humankind.

Fishing for the whole human race—that's a much bigger fishing expedition than the daily run on the Sea of Galilee.

Fishing in the Kingdom is done one person at a time. Catching one fish at a time in the dollars and cents economy is strikingly silly.

Not in the economy of the Kingdom. Every single person is precious, every person is important and worthy of our time and attention.

Just like the cell calls we insist on answering—those calls that pull us away from everything else with an unspoken sense of urgency.

The call of God pulls us away from our self-absorption with our own security, our own future alone, away from worrying about how other people will judge us because we chose to answer the call.

The call into living and risking for the spread of the kingdom: The call to follow Jesus, to let his ongoing conversation with us receive our first attention, and govern our lives regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

### *Jesus' Call Makes Us Whole*

Answering Jesus' call to fish for people changes us. Reforms and reshapes us—brings out the best in us-- in the midst of the real circumstances of our lives.

A pastor shares this recollection of a woman in his parish: "Recently Dolores died.... for the last fifteen years she had been paralyzed.

She was a tiny sickly little woman and yet she was one of the finest persons that I have had the privilege to know.

While she was physically sick and disabled she was one of the most whole people I have ever met.

There was a peace and a joy about her that she communicated to all about her. She was ever joyful and never complaining.

This peace and joy was also communicated to her husband, daughter and three sons. There was a great peace about her passing and her funeral. It was as if she had gone to a place where she had already been.

Up to a few months before she died she had continued her family life (spiritual leadership).

I would send couples to her... She had a great knack of hearing where they were at, and communicating what was relevant to the need of the couple.

After their wedding more than one couple told me that one of their greatest memories was their session with Nang Dolores."

This pastor goes on to say,

"Dolores illustrates for me the difference between being healed and being whole.

She never seemed to ask for healing. Indeed, if she had been healed she may have been just another woman like any of her neighbors caught up in the rat race of life.

But being the whole person that she was and yet disabled she was available in a special way to the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Dolores answered Jesus' call and it shaped her even in the midst of suffering, disease and decline.

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<sup>2</sup> Being Whole Rather Than Cured, Gospel Reflections by Father Gerry Pierse, C.Ss.R., January 23, 2005, TextWeek.com.

In spite of her disability, her decision to follow Jesus on a daily basis made her whole and she in turn served him and gave wholeness to others.

### *Jesus Call Is Good News!*

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that we are ALL called! Our call to follow is our call into wholeness and wellbeing.

The form and shape of our call will differ from that of our neighbor. But Jesus' call is always first and foremost to be healed, released from bondage to whatever ways we are disabled by life and to offer wholeness to others and to work for the wholeness of the world.

This morning, following the call to Discipleship you are invited to come forward to the communion rails for healing prayer . You may pray for:

- healing in body, mind, relationship or spirit;
- you may offer a prayer of confession and request God's forgiving grace;
- you may be anointed for someone else .

Pastor Paul Joseph and I will anoint each person who comes, lay our hands on your head and offer a word of prayer.