

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany. The scripture text is taken from John 1:43-51

An unknown author writes: "Mindin' his own business. He was minding his own business, sitting under the shade tree, doin' his devotions. That's what Nathanael was doing, just before his friend, Philip, came and turned his world up-side down!"

"Mindin' his own business. He was minding his own business, hangin' out with his good friends. That's what Andrew was doing just before his friend, pointed to a stranger and said, "He's the man!"

"Mindin' his own business! He was minding his own business, down at the lake, cleaning his fishing gear. That's what Peter was doin' just before his brother, Andrew, came and said, "Peter, You've gotta meet this guy!"

"Mindin' our own business, that's what we often find ourselves, doing, when Christ comes a calling."

The second half of John's Gospel, chapter 1, tells how the first disciples came to follow Jesus. And, as you read through those events, it's striking how it all came about.

We use this word: "Calling", and it is a word that has almost taken on connotations that are bigger than life. It's almost got a life of its own!

To talk about a "calling" seems like such a heavy thing. It's weighted with seriousness. It is as though you have to talk about it in hushed tones.

Although there is a very serious side to "calling", I've come to see another tone, and that's what we are going to look at this morning.

Some of the questions that naturally come to mind, on this topic, would be: What does it mean to be, "called" of God?

What's involved in hearing and responding to His call? What's in God's mind, when He calls somebody like you or me?

But another question that I'd like to invite you to think about is this: What is the tone of God's calling? Is it booming, is it harsh, or is it demanding?

The answer is "No". When God calls, it is in the tone of an invitation. And I think that, this is true of almost every case.

How often do we use this word, "calling" in some kind of supernatural spiritual sense? Maybe we've got this picture in our minds of Moses before the burning bush as God speaks to him.

Maybe we think that, this is what a calling is supposed to look like. And so, we expect a clap of thunder, the flash of a neon sign, or a heavenly vision of the throne room of God.

But I am coming to realize, that most times, when God calls, it's a lot softer tone, in terms of becoming a disciple of Jesus. God's call is an invitation to follow.

In terms of becoming a disciple of Jesus, God's call is an invitation to follow. Jesus simply said to Philip, "Follow me."

Philip then went to his good friend, Nathanael, and he said to Nathanael; “come and see.” The tone is friendly. It’s conversational. It is an invitation to follow Jesus.

The invitation to follow, is the call to discipleship; but it is also, an invitation to discovery. In a word, it is an invitation to a relationship.

The heartbeat of God’s call on our lives, is an invitation to follow Jesus. Well in order to follow Jesus, we must leave something, one can’t have both.

When Jesus invited Philip to follow Him, he had to leave, the place where he was. Philip left the position where he stood. He left the comforts and familiarity of home, family and work to follow Jesus.

In order for Nathanael to follow Jesus. Nathanael had to leave, he left the shade of the fig tree. He left the reputation of being a highly respected citizen.

Thinking of James and John, Peter and Andrew, in order for each of one of them to respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow, each one had to leave, that which was familiar to them.

James and John, left their father in the fishing boat. Andrew and Peter, left their nets on the shore. Each one of them left the comforts of home, family and work, in order to follow Jesus.

Now, when we hear these words of “leaving home, family and work”, our imaginations immediately jump to taking that in a literal sense.

And our hearts and our minds start churning with anxiety, possibly even fear, at the thought of leaving our families, moving away to some strange city or some foreign nation, all because God has called us away.

Here’s a thought: Instead of focusing on the things we leave, and grieving over them, why not focus on the things we will gain? Philip, Nathanael, James, John, Andrew and Peter, gained a greater understanding, and a deeper relationship

With Jesus. These men found forgiveness and acceptance and a place in God’s plan for the world. Through these men, the world was changed!

Through these men, hearts were saved and lives were changed for the better. Through these men, people of all ages, young and old, male and female, slave and free, discovered the life-changing reality of God’s redeeming love.

For example, Nathanael took the message of Jesus all the way to India. Philip was instrumental in taking the gospel to northern Africa.

And of course later, the Apostle Paul, look at where he went through out the known world of his day, taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and planting churches.

We could on and on. These men, and later women, these disciples of Christ, gave up so much, in order to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

But God doesn’t intend for everyone of us to go to a foreign country, jump into a different culture, or speak a different language.

God doesn't plan for everyone to become a pastor or missionary and go off to some foreign land. God raises up those individuals, across the spectrum of the church. You may not be called to be a pastor or missionary, but God does call us, to follow Christ in faith.

I am struck, when I read the gospel stories of how Jesus called those first disciples, I am struck by how non-specific He is.

Jesus doesn't tell the disciples all that they will face as followers. And perhaps that may be a good thing. Perhaps on the front end of it all, maybe we couldn't handle what hardships we might endure.

But then again, maybe the point of following Jesus is not all the hardships, yes, there will be tough times; and maybe the point of following Jesus is not all the things that we'll have to give up.

Although there are things that simply get in the way of faithfully following Jesus; but maybe the point of following Jesus is simply leaving our old way of life, in order to find the new life in Christ!

The writer of Ephesians says in chapter 4, verse 1: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The first thing that following Jesus, (the calling we have received) the first thing that it means, is leaving our old way of life. (Remember in Christ, you are a new creation)

Following Christ means letting go of our pride, our prejudice, our impatience, our self-centeredness and so forth.

When we talk about the fact that we must do some "leaving" in order to do some following, these are the things that all followers of Jesus must leave!

In the old way of life, these things are far too familiar. They are too comfortable, like an old, faded, thread bare pair of blue jeans.

They just seem to fit so well! And maybe we've spent so much of our lives living in those old ratty jeans, that it seems like home.

Pride and impatience, are just second nature. Self centeredness and vengefulness are familiar territory, but these things are not in harmony with what it means to follow Christ.

In order to follow Him, we need to leave some of the familiar territory. The point of following Christ, is leaving the old way of life, in order to Him, (Christ)

Following Christ is about being transformed from the inside out. It's about letting the life of Christ, reshape and re mold us, so that others can see who we belong too, that we are Children of the Heavenly Father.

That we are people who have been rescued from a futile and fruitless life, that we are folks who have been given a promise bigger than this world can imagine or hope to attain!

Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathanael, and all the other disciples left family, home and work to follow Christ.

Following Christ is stepping away from the old way of life, and pursuing a new life in Christ. That's the point, that's what's at the heart of God's call!

Letting go of the old life, and grabbing ahold of the new life in Christ. You and I have that new life in Christ through God's baptismal grace.

By God's grace through faith, you and I are forgiven of our sins, clothed in Christ's righteousness and given the promise of eternal salvation.

This brings us to our final point. Jesus is the center and source of this calling! Christ is the focal point. He is the voice that we are listening to. His footsteps are ones we are to follow. He is the one we pursue.

When we talk about the "call of God" in our lives and what it means to follow Jesus, so much of it is about imitation. Following Christ is the act of imitating His character, His ways, His heart.

When you look at the gospel stories, it's painfully apparent how often the disciples missed the boat. They had followed Jesus by physically leaving their homes, families, and their jobs. But they were still holding on to some old ways, the old ideas, and the old sins.

The same thing happens to us, to follow Jesus, is to embark upon a journey, and adventure of discovery, not just discovering more about Jesus; but also, discovering more about ourselves, what is buried deep within our hearts; what kinds of treasures we're holding onto, as more important than God.

What kinds of values we have, don't fit in with the values of the Kingdom of God. The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to a journey of discovery, discovering the awesome heart of God, discovering the wonderful plans of God; and discovering who we are.

But this journey can only happen when we remember that Christ is the center and the source of it all! Christ is the focal point. His footsteps are the ones we are following. He is the One we pursue, by faith. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, by your grace, through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, we have been claimed as His own through our baptism into His life, death, and resurrection. Help us to remember, that you have given us a spirit of courage, not of fear, so as to follow You, wherever You call us to go in this life, therefore, building up your Kingdom here on earth. All these things we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.