

**The Call of the Lord**  
**January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Mark 1:14-20**  
**Epiphany 3 B**

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Okay, we're going to put you in charge of a business start-up. We want this thing to go global, and spread to everyone, make millions and billions of dollars and be a household name. You might be thinking, "Me?" But let's go with it. Start-up capital is not a problem, you've got the money to get going. And even more important than that, you get to hand-pick your first employees. No really, you've got a blank check to gather, let's say, the best dozen people you can to get this thing rolling. Pick anybody, they'll leave their current job and come work for you full time with all their energy.

So, who's on that short list? Maybe you don't have a dozen names in mind, but you've probably got an idea of what kind of people you want them to be, right? I doubt there'd be anybody on that list with less than a college education, you need people with smarts. Maybe even hunt down some of the highest IQs on the planet so you've got good people for research and development and for techniques to spread as fast as possible. Probably want people with good connections too, right? People who know people, who can spread the word and promote your product. Helps if those connections are powerful or influential as well. That they can really encourage people to do those favors for you, and get your work going. And if those are the kind of people you're recruiting, well the wealth is probably going to go along with it and that never hurts either.

Yep it's pretty clear the kind of smart decisions we'd make to get all this going, to get it working properly and to have the highest chance of success. And if you've seen through my paper-thin metaphor you know where this is going. How did Jesus approach this same task? Much like the manner in which he was born it wasn't the wealthy or the powerful or the wise that he chose. It was basically the exact opposite: <read text Mark 1:14-20>.

Start off by taking a look at John, the one in prison. Now, God chose him before he was even born, but like Jesus he wasn't born with a family advantage. Still, God could've shaped John's life however he saw fit and yet was he a brilliant orator who was well-respected and had classrooms full in the city? No, he was a guy who lived out in the desert feeding of wild food and shouting messages at the leadership of the time. And even if that drew a crowd for a time, what did he get for sticking to the Lord's plan and being a faithful witness of everything that was happening? He was arrested and in prison, and as we know would die there. Hardly seems like a shining jewel of success.

And look at the men Jesus picks to follow him here. Fishermen. Not doctors or lawyers or princes or kings. Not the wealthy or educated. In fact just the opposite. We're talking bottom of the social barrel, about on par with shepherds. You don't get much less wealthy or powerful or even educated than this. Jesus' choice of them is shocking enough. What's even more shocking is that they just dropped what they were doing and followed him. I mean, you may think to yourself, they're just fishermen, what are they leaving behind? But this was still pretty significant. Translate yourself into their shoes. What they had may not be much, but it's a steady life. Good, honest work. A regular supply of food and shelter, time with family and friends. Perhaps not a life in the lap of luxury, but a steady, reliable one, much like what most of us have.

Now imagine a man proclaiming some new teaching comes by and asks you to drop all that to follow him. You've heard of this guy before. In fact, there was another guy who said similar stuff and you heard he was in prison now. Now, I know how we feel about our God, and I know we also know how this account plays out, but really, objectively speaking under those circumstances, what are the odds you're going to leave that safe life behind and just follow this guy?

But what did Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John do? They dropped everything and followed. The call of the Lord is not irresistible, but it is also devastatingly powerful. The word of God overcomes such silly things like pride or ego, fear or despair, and creates a heart that loves the Lord and because of that listens to his voice and follows his call, regardless of what it asks. And it can, because the voice of the Lord, his call, fills the heart with his love and there is no more room for hopelessness or despair. Following his voice is infinitely better than any simple life or even a life filled with wealth and power. It doesn't matter what earthly dangers might follow along that path because the voice of the one calling is enough to overcome them all.

And so these men, and others, would follow the voice of Jesus, they would listen to his call. And as we well know they would become the foundation of his new church on earth, the gathering of believers through which his message is shared and encouraged in others. The means by which men and women are taught the truth and brought to faith and ultimately saved. There can really be no higher purpose or more important institution and that brings up the initial question of Jesus' choice of these men. As we said, these would hardly seem the most qualified candidates to carry out such a mission of such great importance. Wouldn't it be wiser to choose those better equipped to do the work needed?

Ah, but here we see the wisdom of God shown in the large-scale picture of his plan. Because there are a couple of overriding principles we need to keep in mind as God carries out his work. First of all, he wants us saved, he wants to do whatever he can to save every person possible. But in doing so, God also needs to make it perfectly clear that *he* is the one doing the saving and that we in no way are contributing to the effort at all. As we've said, this is necessary to keep us from becoming conceited or worrying whether we've done our part "right". None of it is up to us, it is up to God. And as such, he is the one who gets the credit, he gets the glory for what he does, for every part of our salvation from start to finish.

Now consider for a moment the opening question I gave you, the one about starting up your new business. Let's say you went through with it as we originally discussed. Hired the best and the brightest and they made your company a jewel of success throughout the world. Who do you think is going to get the credit for getting all that done? You? You just picked people smarter than you to do all the work. No, it's going to be the geniuses and well-connected people you hired who get the credit and glory for the work.

Now consider what God did. He picked people that by all rights should not have succeeded at the task he put before them. In fact, they should have crashed and burned spectacularly. Even during the time Jesus trains them we have frequent examples of their misunderstanding and even outright doubting what Jesus himself tells them. These were not the prime examples we would want to hold up in the church, certainly not the types you want to leave as responsible for that initial push to start the new church and spread it to the nations.

And yet despite all that, what happened? The church of Christ grew. In its own way it thrived. And it spread. It reached out over time to every corner of the world. People heard the message spoken by fishermen and farmers and those people believed and followed the voice of Christ through them. Not because the speakers were educated and skilled, but because the speakers were not educated or skilled it was clear that this could only be by the power of God himself. And so God gets the glory, God gets the credit. By choosing those who could not possibly accomplish the goals themselves, God showed his glory and his power through them.

And that then is exactly what God has done for you. Before him you were nothing. Literally. Oh in a worldly sense there might have been something to you. Some wealth or power or influence, maybe. But before God? Nothing. You were exactly what you confessed to be at the start of our service. By nature a sinner. A defiler of God's will. And in that defiance you had earned exactly one outcome, an outcome that you were powerless to reverse. You were going to die forever. But God took what was a zero balance in you and made you something valuable through his call.

He called to you with a voice that you should have hated, the voice of a God who judged you inadequate, the voice of a God who demands your attention when you only wanted to see yourself, and yet a voice that changed you. The voice filled a dead, cold heart with his love. A love that drove out all fear and trepidation at listening to him and following him. And through that love and trust in him, you are credited with being him. Credited with his holy life and covered with his righteousness. No longer a zero balance but a spiritual positive in his eyes. He has made you something valuable.

And his voice, his call continues to work in you in exactly the same way. It drives out the worthless within you that continually tries to creep back in and fills you instead with the power of God that is able to do what he needs you to do. Even now, on our own, we would slide back into worthlessness. But the voice of God, the power of his call is enough to keep us on the path to eternal life and to carry out his work here and now. It continues to push out the fear and hopelessness and despair that would otherwise overtake us and refills us daily with the joy of being forgiven. And through that power, that love and joy filling us from the inside out, we are able to do his work in this world.

Like the disciples, we are not in and of ourselves, qualified for this work. That doesn't matter. It's not about what we can do. It's about what God can do. If it depended on us, on our abilities and skills and dedication, this enterprise would be doomed to failure before it started. It doesn't depend on your power. It doesn't depend on your smarts. It doesn't matter if your pastor is a powerful ball of charisma or not. The work is done by God through us. We listen to his call and that flows through us to accomplish what needs doing. And that is a very good thing.

Because God does the work, not us. In that we can have comfort and confidence. When the work doesn't seem to be going how we want it to that is not our fault, so long as we are faithful with our responsibilities, God is responsible for the results, not us. And what is accomplished is purely by the power and grace of God. And so he gets the glory, he gets the praise, not us. When his word moves you, it is not the pastor or friend who brought it to you that made that happen, it is God and his power. And to him alone be the glory.

The call of the Lord is powerful. It is a power we need and it is a power we want. It brings us true peace and joy, filling us with his forgiveness and eternal life. Listen to that voice that calls you and let the work he has be done through you, through the power of that call. Amen.