

Third Sunday after the Epiphany Year A: 25 / 26 January 2020
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Reverend Kathy Major

"And God calls us out of ourselves and our comfortable lives into new work every so often – confident that we will be able to accomplish whatever it is that needs doing, because God knows who we are and the gifts we have to give, even though we might not see it or agree."

Isaiah 9: 1-4

1 Corinthians 1: 10-18

Matthew 4: 12-23

Psalm 27: 1, 5-13

In last week's gospel we heard the call of Andrew to 'come and see' who Jesus was and where he lived. This week we have the specific call of Andrew and Peter, James and John to follow Jesus and become 'fishers of people.' Two week's worth of Jesus calling his disciples. Why do we need two weeks of calls? When we get to this set of lessons, I'm always reminded of Dr. James Cone, may he rest in peace, my professor at Union Seminary in New York City, who took one class near the end of the semester in Systematic Theology to preach to us. He paced back and forth in front of the class, shaking his finger at us and practically yelling – 'God needs you. God created you a unique human being. Ain't nobody else like you. No one else can speak out of your experience with God. God needs you to find your voice so you can speak about God...'

Each of us has a call to follow Christ. And some of our following, some of our call is generic, if you will. God says to all of us, 'Come and see.' We all make the same promises at baptism. We are all expected to live holy lives, following the commands of God set forth in the Bible – 'Be kind to one another, forgiving each other' or 'Thou shalt not lie.'

But there is another piece of our call – the particular. Each of us has been called by God in a general way and each of us has a particular call that is part of who we are. Ain't nobody else like you. The particular call from God is called vocation. We each have a vocation. That's what today's gospel lesson is all about. Peter and Andrew, James and John, are fishermen. And Peter and Andrew, James and John hear Jesus call them from fishing on the Sea of Galilee into a new work. Fishing was probably the trade of Peter and Andrew's father. The gospel says that James & John worked on their father's boat. These men were fishermen by trade, it was the life they knew. When Jesus comes along and calls them to be his disciples, Jesus doesn't ignore their life experience. Their life experience becomes part of their individual, particular calls, their vocations. I'll make you fish for people, Jesus says.

Peter and Andrew, James and John. The brothers had a particular call from God to use their talents and skills for the kingdom. You and I have a particular call from God to use our talents and skills for the kingdom, as well.

Those early disciples were lucky. Jesus could look them in the eye and tell them what they were supposed to do. 'I will make you fish for people,' although I'm sure the disciples had no idea at that moment what their lives were going to look like in five years... How are we to figure out our call? What is our vocation? Who will tell us what we are to do, what next steps we are to take?

Discerning God's particular call on our lives will take us all of our whole life's journey to live into. Peter, Andrew, James and John received the call to fish for people and they spent the rest of their lives working out that particular call – establishing the church of Jesus at Pentecost, preaching and teaching, and helping the early church figure out God's call. They found their passion in fishing for people.

Frederick Buechner has said that our vocation is the place where our deepest joy meets the world's great need. Our vocation is found in our passions, in our places of deep joy-in those places where we hear the music.

So another way to ask the question about our particular call from God is to ask the question, 'What brings me deep joy?' 'What is my passion?' 'Where do I hear music?' Living out our vocation, living out our particular call from God is what fulfills us. God has given each of us gifts and passions. And God has given each of us as gifts to the world. Ain't nobody else like you, as Dr. Cone says. God needs us, needs us living into our passions, in order to bring God's kingdom into the world.

What are you doing with your life? Does it bring you joy? What work are you doing in the church? Does that work bring you joy?

If living into our passions is God's particular call for us, church ought to be the most joyful place around – each of us doing what brings us joy, meeting the church's needs and supporting the body of Christ gathered here AND reaching out into the world and bringing our joy and God's love into it.

I know. You may be thinking that if each of us only did what brings us joy, some of the work of the church might not get done. You may be correct. Some work might not get done. I believe that just as the natural world has seasons, so too, our lives have seasons, the life of the parish has seasons. We are more organism than organization. Some work the parish does in one season may not need to be done in another season. As the seasons change, new work might open up for us. The passions will remain the same but the form may change as the seasons change. If we do work because we think it ought to be done, or because 'someone has to do it'

we may find the work exhausting. It won't bring us joy, it will drag us down. If you're feeling tired with the work you are doing, take a moment. Perhaps you're being called into other work. Perhaps someone else is being called into the work you've been doing and would be grateful for the chance to do it instead. Perhaps this season's work has been completed and it's time to move on. If each of us follows God's call, all the work the church needs to get done will get done.

This is the perfect time to consider our vocations and what brings us joy – you've just had your annual meeting. Was there something that caught your ear, that sparked your interest, that made you want to find out more about some ministry or activity? I'm sure that every ministry within this church would welcome you to sit in, ask questions about what they do, and invite you to join them in their vocation...

It's risky business, this following God. God asks us to consider what we're doing and why. And God calls us out of ourselves and our comfortable lives into new work every so often – confident that we will be able to accomplish whatever it is that needs doing, because God knows who we are and the gifts we have to give, even though we might not see it or agree. Luckily, God leads us one step at a time, slowly drawing us towards our true selves and the life God imagines for us.

James and John, Andrew and Peter were given the particular call to 'fish for people.' They had no idea how they would change the world when they left their nets to follow. What is God's particular call on your life? Ain't nobody else like you. What is your passion, your deepest joy? Follow it, take the risk, let God transform your life. May we readily answer God's call to us, following in the footsteps of those early disciples. Amen.