

“Called . . .”

Matthew 4:12-22

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At first, when Dan and I got our babies home from the hospital, I eagerly anticipated the cries in the middle of the night from our new bundles of joy. That cry thrilled me because this new baby needed us. He was calling us to sweep him up in our arms and meet his every need.

Then, after a few almost sleepless nights, reality set in. Yes, we were “chosen”, we were needed, but . . . it was all the time. We were on call. Then we began the routine of hearing the baby cry and awakening in a stupor. Dan and I would elbow each other. “It’s your turn, I think.” “No, I’m sure I was up last time.” OK . . . “rocks, paper, scissors.” Several days later, we were so incoherent we couldn’t remember our names, ranks, serial numbers or anything of importance—except the baby. The routine turned to one of us elbowing the other at the sound of the baby. I don’t know who thought of it first, but whoever did pretended to be asleep even with repeated jabs to the arm beside him or her. “Maybe if I pretend to be in a coma, she’ll get up this time.”

It was thrilling to me when the children learned my name: “Mom.”

Cameron, our youngest, would stand up in his crib in the morning or the middle of the night sometimes and say: “Mama, I ‘hungy’ (sic). I want cake.”

The “I wants” and “I needs” continue at least into the teenage years (which is far as I’ve made it so far). I forgot my lunch box. I need you to bring it to me. I need money. I need just a little more money. Increasingly at home it is I need food and lots of it. Can you drive us to the movies? Can you pick us up? Where are my socks? Mom Occasionally, I wish they would forget my name.

There were things about the call to parenthood which they left out of all those books we bought. The call is spoken and unspoken, for one. It is one that is heard with the ears and with the heart. The call is always with us. The love is indescribable.

Of course they also left out what you have to leave behind to answer this call. In the early years and then later in the teenage years, you leave behind sleep. You leave behind placing yourself first and place someone else first. You give up the freedom to always do as you please. You find you are called everyday to leave behind selfishness and your own agenda. You are now in tune with another—listening with ear and heart.

In Matthew we read of Jesus calling his first disciples. These fishermen were minding their own business, casting the nets into the water to catch fish and others mending their nets as they prepared to do the same. Jesus walked by one day and said

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately, they left their nets—immediately the others left their boat and their father—and followed Jesus.

The call of Jesus changed the lives of these fishermen. Their lives began to be reoriented when they answered that call. Things would never be the same. The call, not unlike the one to parenthood, was spoken and unspoken. It was a call that was heard with the ears and with the heart. The call, from that day forward, was always with them. The pull to this Jesus was indescribable and apparently for these fishermen irresistible.

These new disciples were undoubtedly excited at first. “He knows our names.” “He needs us.” “He’s calling us.” And, like bumbling new parents, these guys charged in without any idea of what that call to discipleship would look and sound and feel like . . . every day, for the rest of their lives. They had no idea what it would be like to be called to leave behind so much more than their jobs. They would forever be allowing Jesus to reorient their lives. They would forever have his call in their ears and in their hearts. The call would take them to places and situations they could have never anticipated that day in their boats. The call would take them to the heights of joy and to the depths of despair. They had no idea that accepting this call from Jesus meant they’d be “on call” for him the rest of their lives.

The disciples got tired like we do. They argued among themselves about who would be first in power and last in servanthood. “I did it last time.” “It’s your turn.” Perhaps they pretended to sleep sometimes, too, when the call sought to awaken them at their points of exhaustion. At those times it wasn’t so great that Jesus knew their names and needed them as on-call disciples.

For us it’s the same. On one hand it is fabulous to know that Jesus has called us to be his disciples. We are known, wanted, needed, and accepted. Sometimes we jump up at a moment’s notice and with great enthusiasm to answer Christ’s call. Sometimes we leave behind our selfishness and our agenda with joy. Sometimes we look at others and say: “I did it last time. It’s your turn.” Sometimes we even pretend to be asleep because we didn’t know we were signing up to be on-call 24/7. We didn’t know we signed up for something that would reorient our lives, our choices, our priorities, our “everything” if we let it. We didn’t know that signing up to be a disciple of Jesus was so all-encompassing. I thought it just meant being nice most of the time, and pretty much doing the right thing and going to church most Sundays and giving a little money. I had no idea this call was to transform my life every day, wherever I am—in the line at the grocery store, at work, at school, at home, at church; when I’m happy and upbeat and when I’m exhausted; when I’ve got all the answers and when I don’t have a single one. I had no idea I would always hear this call with my heart—even when I close my ears, even when I pretend to be asleep—everywhere, all the time. “Follow me.” “Follow me.”

I used to think this passage of scripture—the call of the first disciples—meant everyone had to **do** more. I used to think it meant leaving behind something very tangible. While that may be the nature of the call in some cases, I have grown to see that the call of Jesus in our lives does not necessarily mean doing more for Jesus. I have grown to see that it is not necessarily about leaving behind a job, a family, a career, a hobby or a house—although sometimes we are asked to do just that. Rather the call of Jesus is to reorient our hearts. It is to repent—change directions. It is to allow Jesus to reorient our lives right where we are and anywhere else he leads us. The reorientation involves daily leaving behind selfishness. It involves submitting ourselves to the agenda of another—of Christ—in our daily living.

Jesus calls us: “Follow me. Follow me.” Jesus calls us on a lifelong journey—one on which we will travel more faithfully at times than at others. We will not arrive by our own efforts. Rather, we will arrive by grace. That arrival will take place when we stand on the lakeshore of heaven and Jesus speaks our name and says “Follow me.” Until then, we go forth in faith to answer the all-encompassing call of Christ to follow Him.