

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING: EACH ONE OF US IS CALLED

Mark 1:14-20

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I know it doesn't happen this way any more at all, but I suspect many of you can relate to this story from my childhood. It was P.E. class, gym class, in elementary school, and we were playing volleyball. I was short (I know you're surprised at that), very short, slightly underweight, and wore glasses. My favorite place to be was the library, not the gym. Kids didn't play many organized sports before junior high in those days — so athletics was foreign to my experience and I wasn't especially naturally coordinated.

The first thing the gym teacher would do is line us up, select the two most athletically-gifted children to be team captains, and then those two children would select their teams. I'm sure I wasn't the only student to immediately grow a knot in my stomach. "Please don't let me be picked last." The team captains would pick the tallest, most coordinated, most confident boys first, and then the tallest, most coordinated, most confident girls, and then the rest of us were left. The overweight, the klutzy, the skinny, the short.

Thank goodness things have changed, because that experience left me feeling completely inadequate. Gym class in elementary school left me feeling like I could never enjoy anything athletic for the rest of my life.

For you it might not have been gym class. Maybe it was choir, when the music teacher called you aside, as really happened to a friend of mine, and told you to please sing as quietly as possible so as not to throw off the people singing around you. Up un-

til that moment, you enjoyed choir, but somehow music has never been the same for you since you were told NOT to make your joyful noise.

And so the messages come at us, and we incorporate them...do you know what that word means? We take them into our bodies. We start to believe and embody what has been said about us. "You're really bad at math, aren't you?" "It's a shame you're not as pretty as your sister." Or maybe you overhear a parent say about your sibling, "Now John is the brains in the family." You're too fat, you're too thin. You're too sensitive. Those messages become old tapes that play in your mind, that keep rewinding; they're hard to get rid of. It becomes difficult to believe new and different messages.

But there is good news. God is doing a new thing. Many of you have asked me about this beautiful fabric waterfall. I want to give a shout-out this morning to our worship decorating team who conceived it and put it together, and Tim Schulz who put his version of water on the bulletin cover. If you see them, you might want to thank them. The team is Carolyn Coy, Teri Ann Jasany, Drew Small and Linda Yonkers. When our worship planning group met in the fall to look at this worship series, Beau and I had selected our scripture passages already. As we read through them, we noticed that water was mentioned in most of them. The first week, Beau preached on Isaiah 43. In verse 19, God says, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Last week, I shared a story of re-experiencing baptism at the River Jordan.

And this week, we find Jesus at the Sea of Galilee. We began talking about a way to visually connect these water stories, and enhance the beauty of our worship space. Our worship decorating team several hours planning and shopping for fabric.

Thanks to Tim Penton who loaned the frames. Then 5 hours to cut, 3-4 hours to sew and 6 hours to set up. And as it happens, our Vacation Bible School this year has a water theme too, so the fabric will be re-used of that and for many other occasions.

God is doing a new thing. Just as water refreshes, just as water nourishes and brings life, God's spirit is continually renewing us and our world.

Our passage for this morning is from the first chapter of the gospel of Mark. This is the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has barely begun, and he knows this. He knows that he cannot do God's work alone. How does he know this? Not from trial and error; it's too early for that. He hasn't been anywhere yet. He isn't burned out. He isn't tired and in need of companionship. So how does Jesus know that the first thing he should do is to gather a group around him?

Well, he's just spent forty days in the wilderness. The sequence of events, in Matthew, Mark and Luke is this. Jesus is baptized, he spends forty days in the wilderness, facing temptation, and then he begins his public ministry. Forty days. Those days are for spiritual preparation. Those forty days are for prayer, meditation, introspection. Forty days to listen to God. In the midst of those forty days as he thinks about his future, he encounters temptation. But mostly he's listening to God. And presumably one of the things God tells him is this: "You will need company." This isn't meant to be solitary work.

What an important task, choosing your colleagues! If you've ever spent time in any kind of workplace, you know what a difference your coworkers make. Spend 40 hours a week with someone who's grumpy or lazy, spend 40 hours with someone who complains...it will drag you down. But work next to someone fun, someone energetic,

and you will find yourself uplifted. You'd think that Jesus would have held numerous interviews for work as important as his. But let's look again at the text from Mark: "As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting nets into the sea. 'Hey you two, follow me!' He keeps walking along the shore. A few minutes later, he sees James and John in their boat mending nets. "Hey you two, follow me." And voila, four disciples.

What does that say to us, that Jesus took such little time selecting his colleagues? He doesn't get to know them, he doesn't find out what their personalities are like. He does not ask them what they believe. He doesn't ask them if they've made any really big mistakes in their lives.

I've thought a lot about this passage over the years. Mostly I've focused on the four disciples. What was it about Jesus that made them leave, immediately, and follow him? They left their families - temporarily at least, they left their livelihoods. To follow a man they'd never met. It wasn't like Jesus was already well-known. This is Mark chapter 1! No one's heard of this guy Jesus. Yet they followed. And that is amazing. It tells us something about Jesus' charisma, doesn't it? Charisma isn't quite the right word, though. You can have charisma that's fake, that's all on the outside. Charm, shmooze, you could call it. That's not what Jesus had. His personal power came from inside. He spoke to these four men, and there was something about him that reached them deep inside as well. His words, his voice, his presence was so compelling, so influential, that they immediately followed.

And it is amazing. But equally amazing is that Jesus chose them. What does it say to us? It seems pretty clear. There is only one qualification for Jesus' disciples.

Follow. Say yes. You don't have to have certain credentials, there are no educational requirements. There is something for each one of us to do as we work together to build the beloved community, God's kingdom, God's reign on earth. The message couldn't be more clear. Jesus is taking a walk. He points to the first four people he sees. "You, you, you and you." Each one of us is called.

Each one of us is called to different roles throughout our lifetimes. In each of those roles, we can live out our calling as followers of Jesus. When we are parents, we can be parents who follow Jesus, intentionally practicing our faith in that role, teaching our children the values we honor, teaching them mostly by example. We can live out our calling as followers of Jesus in our roles as spouses, friends, co-workers, intentionally shaping our relationships to be centered in God. In other words, your "calling" is not what you do while you're at church, but the way you live in the whole of your life.

It's a way of life that asks the question, "How can I approach this role as a person who follows Jesus?" "How can I live out this role in a way that will help me draw closer to God?" Here's an example from the writer Rob Bell. He tells this story on a podcast I listened to recently. "I just met a guy who cleans houses for a living. We started chatting because we have a mutual friend. 'You clean houses – tell me more about that.' He said, 'People allow me into their homes to bring order and cleanliness.' 'Wow, you take this really seriously.'" The man spoke about his job with reverence, as if it were a holy and sacred calling: "Oh, the fact that people would allow me into their most intimate spaces...so that I could help a family bring order and beauty and cleanliness...to their home, so that they could have this kind of place to come home to..." Rob Bell said to the man who cleans houses for a living, "The families you work for must be so lucky

to have you to clean their house.” And the man said to Rob Bell, “I’m the one who’s blessed.” That’s a man who’s figured out how to live his calling. He has found a deeper purpose in work that many would consider mundane or even menial. But to him it’s a way of following God.

Many people think they need a new calling, a new job, a new purpose, and sometimes that indeed is the case. But sometimes what we need is a new way to think about the work and the roles we already have. Isn’t it a calling to be a kind person? To be a person who lives with intention? To be a person who is trying to pay more attention to the people around us, to the beauty around us, to all of our reasons for gratitude and joy?

Some people think they don’t have a calling. That the day God was handing out talents they were home sick...some think they’re not worthy to follow Jesus. They’ve made too many mistakes, they harbor too many doubts. They’re too old, too young, too busy. These negative thoughts hold us back. The new thing God is doing is calling us to do is to follow our dreams and not our fears. God calls each of us. All of us. There is not a single skill set that is not needed in God’s beloved community, God’s kingdom, God’s realm.

In the secular world we talk a lot about leadership, but we don’t talk much about follower-ship. The direction of our lives depends on who and what we choose to follow. Follow like your life depends on it, because it does. Have you ever dreamt of dropping everything, dumping all your baggage, and starting over? Four fishermen named Simon, Andrew, James and John did it. They did it in response to a call, not a call to lead, but a call to follow.

One day in high school, a bunch of my youth group friends invited me to play on a co-ed volleyball team. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to play volleyball. The very thought of it sent me back to that elementary school gym in Kansas. But these were my best friends, and I always wanted to spend time with them, so I decided to try it. It was non-competitive, it was just for fun, I relaxed. A few friends gave me pointers. I actually could serve the ball and get it over the net! It was the first time in my life that I enjoyed an athletic experience. I don't consider myself a jock by any means, but since that time I've always belonged to a gym or taken exercise classes. I can't imagine how much less healthy I would be if I had let that early experience keep me from engaging in yoga or aerobics or weight-lifting.

Don't let someone else define you or diminish you. Turn off the old tapes. In fact, throw them away. You can't even buy a tape player any more, anyway. God is doing a new thing! God is calling each of us to follow Jesus, which, really, is the same thing as following our dreams.