

The Calling
Isaiah 49:1-7 & John 1:29-42 January 16, 2011

I. It was 1972...

A. I was a junior in High School.

B. Along with Kyle Weir, the son of my Presbyterian Pastor, who later became a Presbyterian minister, I was attending a Crusade for Christ retreat at, of all places, Camp La Foret.

C. It was a very snowy night and the snow was piled high everywhere, including on the roof of the Ponderosa Lodge where we gathered for a very charismatic talk about how the world was soon to come to an end and if you didn't believe you'd go to hell.

It was all about John's Apocalypse and how the United Nations was a tool of Satan and the unification of Europe was proof that it was all coming to an end soon.

Just as the speaker was reaching the climax of his talk and we were all sure the end was coming any moment – that mountain of snow on the roof came avalanching down with a roar that brought screams from the more frail of spirits.

For a moment we thought the world was truly coming to an end, right then and there. "God I believe – I believe!"

D. Later that night, laying in the bunk beds, one I believe they currently have, I was seeking what God wanted me to do with my life.

I would be graduating from High School in a year and I really had no plan for my future. So I prayed about it and I took the well known and scientifically tested path and closed my eyes and opened my Bible and placed down my finger and then opened my eyes and read what the Spirit had in store for me.

E. In the dim light, in which I then could still read, I read the following words,

“The Lord called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength— he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

- F. I immediately took it as a sign of God calling me into the ministry and just as immediately I said, “No way!”
 - G. No way. It ain’t happenin’. No way.
- II. Little did I know that I was joining the ranks of the reluctant prophets.
- A. Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus and Mike King, Jr.
 - B. Not to equate myself with these icons, messiahs and prophets, but just to say that I found out that a reluctance in stepping up to God’s calling is not unusual.
 1. Moses, was really not into becoming a hero – some silly excuse about not being able to speak in public.
 2. Elijah, went running off in fear.
 3. Jeremiah had some lame excuse that he was only a child.
 4. Jesus was fine until it really got tough and he then asked for God relieve him of his mission, until he finally came around and accepted his calling.
 5. And Mike. To be known as Martin Luther King, Jr., he really wasn’t into being some prophet,

much less a martyr.

He liked to party, shoot pool, get in a good scuffle now and then, but God had other plans for him.

III. So what's up with Andrew and Simon, a.k.a. Cephus, a.k.a. Peter?

- A. I'll tell you what's up.
They were just signing up to be "followers;" not leaders.
- B. Peter was all excited as a follower of Jesus.
- C. Jesus was going to do wonderful things.
 - 1. He was going to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, run the devil out of town, set the captives free, (that of course meaning that he was going to run the Romans out of town and he was going to establish God's Realm, right here on earth.
 - 2. Yeah, it was gonna be cool.
- D. Peter wanted a front row seat to all of this.
He wanted to be close to the action, close to the power.
- E. He would follow Jesus anywhere.

- F. So there just wasn't any reluctance – because he wasn't going to lead the movement, he was just gonna be a follower.

IV. But,...God can be tricky

- A. The bait set, the fish had been hooked and now came the switch.
Yeah the old bait and switch.
- B. “What do you mean you're bailing on us,” you could hear Peter screaming at Jesus. I thought you were going to lead us. Now you tell me your leaving us and I'm gonna be in charge.
No way. It ain't happenin'. No way.
- C. But as we know, according to Matthew's gospel, Peter became the head of the church, the Rock upon which the church was built.

V. Well, that wasn't the last time God used the bait and switch.

- A. In fact I'd say the bait and switch maneuver is one of God's favorites.
- B. God seems to know that some folk just have to ease their way into it.

- C. So bring ‘em in under guise of some easy ‘follower’ role and then slowly move them into position to take over.
- D. Of course any good nominations committee member has learned well from God.
Hey, Carolyn – how’s that workin’ out for you?

VI. My journey wasn’t all that dissimilar to Peter’s.

- A. True, God gave me a heads up back in High School, but that really wasn’t the path I wanted to follow.
- B. I would be a good follower, I’d be a good disciple.
As I started college, I was a bit of what was called a “Jesus Freak.”
But I also loved to party with my less ‘freaky’ friends and my temperament and other interests were far from pastoral.
- C. But God was patient.
It was like God had all the time in the world.
It’s just somehow not fair when a mere mortal is up against the Eternal.

- D. Even when I got married, Shelly made it ever so clear that I could go into any profession other than the ministry.
- E. I even went into Seminary to get the degree in Master of Arts in Religious Education – not a Master of Divinity.
I was going to be a teacher – not a Pastor.
- F. It wasn't until towards the end of my MAR program that God finally completed the switch and I found myself in the M.Div program and on the path to ordination in a church I had only first heard of year earlier – the United Church of Christ.

VII. Well, I will promise you that Martin Luther King, Jr. did not start his education with any inclination that he would someday be perhaps the most significant religious leader since his name sake, Martin Luther.

- A. When he got his Bachelors degree in sociology, he wasn't thinking of leading a nation through the wilderness.
- B. When he got his Divinity degree, he knew he was going to be a preacher and follow in his

father's footsteps, but he really had no clue what was a head.

But the bait had been tossed and the hook had been set.

- C. When he got his Doctor of Philosophy degree he was on the road to success. It was the 1950s and he was a negro with a Ph.D., a success beyond belief; but little did he know what kind of success was ahead for him or that success might require of him his own life.
- D. When he organized boycotts and founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference he knew God had called him to leadership and that life was getting a little dangerous.
- E. Clearly by the time he went to Memphis to support the sanitation workers – he knew – he knew what God would require. He had been to the mountaintop, he had seen the promised land and he knew, that like Moses, he wouldn't enter it; but he had taken a nation – the world -- through the wilderness and fulfilled his calling.

VIII. So how about You?

- A. God calls each of us – every one of us; not necessarily to ordination, but to some role in the building of God’s realm.
- B. And if these last few minutes have communicated anything I hope it is the message that God’s call is something that is continuous, though sometimes murky, sometimes clear; sometimes it’s a bait and switch; sometimes it’s a surprise and other times you can see it comin’, like a slow train a-comin’ down the track, and it’s comin’ no matter how much you deny it.
- C. And just a warning – don’t be surprised, if one day you find that you’re no longer just -- a follower.
- D. May God be with you.
AMEN.