

## **“The Calling”**

My mother’s father, Eugene Hembree, was a railroad engineer for 45 years. He worked hard at his job, but he also had his hobbies when he was not working. His main hobby was wood-working and building furniture. He had a workshop behind his house where he had a number of tools and machines. He made desks, tables, and coffee tables. One summer, when I was about 12 years old, he asked me if I wanted to make something in the workshop. I was excited; I said yes. We looked through some books of his and picked out the plan for a birdhouse. He then carefully led me through cutting the pieces of wood on the various machines. We measured. We got together all the nails, screws and glue we needed to put the final product together. In the end, we had created a beautiful, functioning birdhouse which I ended up using for years. All during the process I was motivated to finish because I could see the culmination of our hard work.

I wonder though, how I would have reacted if I had been given instructions with no solid idea of the end result? What would happen if we were told what to do, but not why? What if I had been told to run the wood working machines but not that it was for the purpose of making a birdhouse?

In our reading from Luke 5 this week, Jesus essentially calls Simon Peter to a project without clear results. “Put out into the deep water, “he says,” and let

down your nets for a catch.” There is no indication of what this catch will be. A good one? Just adequate or abundant? A catch that will feed a family or a whole village. The call to Simon is clear and simple: put out your net. But the result is difficult to even imagine. A catch seems fairly impossible, given that the fishermen have already been fishing all night and have caught nothing. To cast nets out again--this time into deep water, which likely means more and more work---does not seem promising.

But, we must remember, there's a catch. Jesus is at work.

Simon Peter's reaction to the call and command of Jesus is one of disbelief, distrust and a little bit of defensiveness. Simon says, “Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing.” He is quick to tell Jesus what he knows, but it is difficult for him to imagine what he does not know. But he still listens to Jesus enough to put down the nets. And look what happens! The nets are filled with multitudes of fish, so many the nets are about to break. Simon Peter then confesses that his sin made him doubt and kept him from fully trusting in what Jesus could do.

Jesus could have rubbed it in, called out Peter's unbelief, and said, “I told you so.” But Jesus simply responds, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be

catching people.” Instead of focusing on Peter’s lack of trust, Jesus highlights the continual need to catch, even when the results are a mystery to us.

One thing we must remember is that we rarely, if ever, promised a clear result to our work. Young adults work toward a retirement they cannot see. Will they become ill in their fifties and never get to enjoy their savings? I saw this happen with my father, who died an early death at age fifty-nine from cancer, never used the Social Security he had paid into, and never had a retirement to enjoy. Young children go to school and stack up their extracurricular activities for years in order to be considered successful in society. Will they go to college upon graduation, or will life circumstances lead them on a different path? No one knows. I was talking to a friend the other day who has two children about the same age as our children, Will and Catherine. He told me he was impressed with how our two children are so goal-oriented and focused in their careers. He has two daughters who have college degrees but don’t seem to know where they are headed. I told him we were fortunate but we have to continue to trust God that our children will be directed where God needs them.

When Jesus asks us to follow him, he does not expect us to know the clear result at the end. When he asks Simon to put out into the deep water, he merely asks Simon to do what Simon knows how to do. Nothing more, nothing less,

Simon is a fisherman. He knows just how to cast nets for a catch. He knows the sea and the life within it. He knows how to do this; it is the work he has been equipped to do. So this time, when Jesus asks Simon to do his job, the result---the catch---is left to Jesus.

Reflecting on my own call into pastoral ministry made me think of the lesson from this passage. When I first realized I was being called into ministry to a congregation I, like Simon Peter, had my disbelief. I had never thought I was to be a minister. I had always thought my calling was to provide a Christian witness in the legal profession. It never occurred to me that God would ultimately call me to be a minister to a church.

I came to realize, after several years in seminary and the first few years of my ministry, that God prepares us for God's result. God had in fact called me to initially be a lawyer, and what I did in that profession ultimately prepared me for the ministry. I worked with family law, probate law, and social services law. I was working with people who had life problems, who had family problems, and it gave me valuable life experience that no one can learn in a book. I got experience making arguments to juries, which provided me with public speaking skills which translated into preparing and giving sermons to groups of people. I ran my own business for twenty years, which gave me administrative skills.

In the Isaiah reading for today, we hear another call to simply go---without knowledge of what may come or how everything will end. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” God asks. Send where? To do what? This call elicits clarifying questions.

But Isaiah, without question or curiosity about the end result (or even what the journey will look like), responds with enthusiasm: “Here am I; send me!” It seems that the call to follow the Lord is a call with no end in sight. In this case, Isaiah is not even told what to do exactly; he is just called to go. The simple fact that he is here, that he exists, is enough for him to serve as integral part of God’s mission.

Like Isaiah, like Simon Peter, and like all the others who go before us, we are called in the midst of our daily lives to serve in God’s mission for the world. Cast your nets, write your papers, teach your students, balance financial accounts, design the buildings, try the legal cases, pour the concrete, make the lattes, lead the meetings, administer the IVs, play the piano, answer the phones. Do what you know how to do, and Jesus will use it to draw others into the kingdom of God.

Rarely does God reveal to us our destination. I realize I do not know my final destination in His plans, nor do I even know all the stops along the way. God reveals to us the means through which we are called to participate in God’s end

result. While we do what we are created, equipped, and skilled to do, we entrust  
the result to God.

Because when it comes to God's call, there's always a catch.