

What would make you drop everything? Career change, marriage, divorce, new baby, “empty nester”, real estate deal, winning the lottery? Think about the times something happened that changed the direction of your life. If so, you understand Jesus’ disciples. Going by Lake Galilee, Jesus sees fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John. He doesn’t look at their resume, and they don’t look at his. Perhaps after the hard work of fishing all night long, the disciples were ready for a career change, but when Jesus asks them to follow they do so “immediately”, leaving job, family and friends. They would not look back.

Any casual reading of the Bible shows God calling ordinary people in unexpected ways to do extraordinary things. In the gospels, it is Jesus calling people to leave things behind and live differently so that God’s love might be made real. This was dramatic for the first disciples as it changed their lives forever, but Jesus’ calling may happen in simpler ways too. When the sudden thought comes across your mind that you should volunteer at the thrift shop, or make sandwiches for the homeless, that is Jesus’ calling too.

This text reminds us to keep our minds and hearts open to how and when Jesus might be calling us. In whatever form the call comes, it asks us to leave something behind and embrace something new. Jesus doesn’t use neon signs or dramatic effects to show God’s gracious love, but ordinary people are still called to do extraordinary things. Whether you are 5 or 50, 18 or 80, listening for Christ’s call and following it is part of what it means to be baptized.

This is a challenge because we do not live in a society that affirms faith. Reactions to quarterback Tim Tebow's Christian faith have been remarkable. Commentator Charles Barkley called Tebow "our national nightmare", even though Mr. Barkley played basketball not football. What makes him an expert on either football or faith? Commentator Bill Maher mocked Tebow with foul language. An ad for Maher's TV show says "He knows the truth". Be wary of people who profess to "know the truth" because they usually don't. Comedian Jimmy Fallon lampooned Tebow. Is it really funny to make fun of faith?

Society is uneasy when people try to live life by faith. It demands that the voices we should be listening to are those of money, power, and fame because they open the path to security and peace. Society forgets that money, power and fame are always temporary. They provide nothing when you are lying on a bed terminally ill in a hospital. Faith and trying to listen for God's direction in life is complicated, personal and not something that society honors or values. When you try to follow faith's leading, society doesn't know how to handle it.

What encourages us in the hard work of living by faith is what Jesus declared. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is near." That phrase *Kingdom of God* is used 66 times in the gospel and the corresponding phrase *Kingdom of Heaven* is used 33 times. God's incarnation in the world through Jesus Christ opened a new understanding of God's intentions, replacing judgment and damnation with love and grace. We have the courage to listen for God's calling in our lives because we sense God is at work slowly changing the world.

The birth of Christ in Bethlehem and his death at Calvary are the historical markers of God's gentle rule among us. We know whose we are and what God's mark of grace on us in baptism calls us to be. God is still at work using ordinary people, in unexpected ways, to do extraordinary things. God's kingdom of grace is still overcoming the illusions of peace the world yet chases after, and it happens most often in the lives of ordinary people.

Pr. Larry Schaefer and his wife Carol retired after ministry in Pennsylvania. They were members here but got involved in a ministry to disadvantaged children in Florida. They thought they were retired, but God thought otherwise. David Ellefson is a bass guitarist with the heavy metal rock band Megadeath. He grew up in a Lutheran church but followed many rock and roll musicians -abusing drugs and alcohol. After rehab, he returned to the church and now is studying at our seminary in St. Louis to become a pastor.

One never knows just how and when Jesus may open a door for serving. Fishermen in the 1st century, rock musicians in the 21st century, people like you and me; ordinary people called in unexpected ways to do extraordinary things. May your minds and hearts be open to Jesus' voice inviting you to do your part in furthering God's love and grace in the world.

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