

Today's texts brothers are basically about Biblical calls and answers; We sometimes refer to them as the Call of Jeremiah, the Call of Isaiah, and as we heard today, the Call of the First Disciples Peter, James and John. And there are others famous Biblical calls; calls given to and accepted by Paul, Elijah, Moses and Hosea. Those were all relatively dramatic calls and most calls are probably less dramatic and experienced more as a process than an event. Ultimately though all calls are in many ways, invitations to leave what we are doing and take on a new way of life.

The concept, the term, "a call" or "Calling", has taken on symbolic power in our language. When many protestant congregations want to hire a pastor these days, they extend to him a "Call." In our own tradition, priests, male and female religious, even teachers and doctors carry out a "calling."

For each of us here, in some small way at least, God confronts each of us with an invitation and we are able to respond to it freely, with acceptance or rejection. Within the Lutheran community which teaches strongly about the priesthood of all believers, it is common to say, following Luther, that all Christians have a vocation.

So what is it that makes some of us disciples and other dissenters? It's interesting to see how people respond to God's call in different ways. When I was in London recently, Philip dragged me along to the theatre to see a play called "The Curious Incident of the Dog in Night Time". It's a bestselling novel in which the narrator is an autistic fifteen-year-old boy who thinks very differently from most people and who uses his skills of careful logical analysis to solve a mystery. The story points out, at least to me, that people look at the same realities differently, and why they do so. Our experiences, our genes, the way our minds are put together, cause some to say "black" and others to say "white." It's no different with matters theological. The percentage of people who are violently atheistic is small yet the percentage of those who find religious "callings" or vocations boring or unsuitable in the modern world is increasing and people like us who think our own positive response to our call from God is unremarkable, seem to find themselves in growing minorities. Why is this so?

When I was a very young man, I read a book called *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson. It was basically a book about gang life in urban New York, a rough and tough jungle in which Nicky Cruz had heard Christ's call and had his life turned around. Nicky Cruz later became a well-known speaker with a huge teen-age fan base and he often spoke about his dramatic conversion from a life of murder, rape and theft to a life of service to God. Part of Cruz's preaching method involved an "altar call" such as we often see in Pentecostal churches. The number of people who responded to the call was amazing, possibly, at least in part, to the impact Cruz's story had on his audience. He was living proof of God-dwelling within him and him responding to God's call.

Our personal calls come in different ways but just because they lack drama does not mean they are not powerful and life-changing. And just because our friends and relatives don't respond as we do does not mean that God's call lacks power and authority.

A call from God requires that we have a perspective or focus that is broad and bold, that sees the larger world and has a vision for what it can become. He calls us and sends us out in the same way he sent Peter and James and John. The God who calls us is an "Epiphany" God who makes himself known through us personally, through our ministries, through our acceptance of others, through our outreach.

I must admit it's amazing whom this Epiphany God calls. Peter's first reaction, after being in the presence of Jesus' power, is “get away from me for I am a sinful man.” I think we can all safely say the same thing. All of us might wonder how God could possibly use us. This, of course, was the response of most whom God called in Biblical settings. Moses claimed he couldn't speak, Elijah said nobody would believe, Jonah was stubborn because the people converted, Paul was the “least of all the apostles.” Yet each of us, are called, as was Peter and John, and James.

This story about Peter's experience with Jesus in particular should clarify our role as Christians. Jesus says to Peter, and he says to us, “Be not afraid. “you will be fishers of men” and that brothers, is exactly what we are. I’m not a great fisherman; I have enjoyed it at times over the years, usually mostly when I have actually caught something. But when the catch is scarce then I find it somewhat boring. In some ways that is how I feel about our little church. After 15 years the catch has been small and the challenge to keep going is perhaps harder than the original call itself because the promise of what could be was more inviting then the reality of what has been. I’m sure it would have been the same for the first disciples. If Peter and John and James had known what the future held for them as a result of following Jesus, would they have left their little

fishing boats? I really doubt it but, having taken up the challenge, and despite the doubts along the way, they persisted, even after Jesus left them physically.

And brothers, I think that is where we find ourselves today. As we embark on yet another move, even as we approach our 15th anniversary, Christ once again calls us to put our fear aside, put aside our disappointment and cast out once more into deep waters. As we come to the season of Lent, it is perhaps appropriate that we use this time to regroup, to reconsider what is important in our ministry and to look not only to the Resurrection of Christ but to the resurrection of our commitment to the call, the vocation, we have been given at differing times and in differing ways.