

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: January 24, 2021 Year B 3rd Sunday after Epiphany/Ordinary Time

Text: Mark 1:14-20

Title: Called to be Together

Focus: We live out our call or live in discipleship together

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Feeling Weary?

Last month I led a graveside memorial service giving thanks to God for the life of Ed Anderson. We were gathered outside on the hillside at Mt. View Cemetery.

One of the scripture readings we read, Psalm 121, was selected because of that outdoor setting at Mt. View and the reference to the surrounding hills in the text. The psalm was likely recited or sung by those making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and traveling through the Judean Hills to get to the distant city.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (Ps. 121:1-2)

The psalmist trusts in God the Creator, who is present with us during our journey. The physical setting of the text as well as the affirmation of God’s presence and protection during time of distress made it a good choice for the service.

Despite the outdoor setting, we were able to incorporate music into the service: One of the songs we played was a recording of Simon and Garfunkel’s *Bridge Over Troubled Water*.

We selected that song in part because it was one of Ed’s own favorites, but also because it seemed so fitting for the times in which we are living and the need for comfort during a time of loss.

Paul Simon crafted the song in the spring of 1969, which was a time of turmoil and grief across the nation and across the globe. People had experienced multiple losses and crises, such as the recent deaths of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, racial tensions, and the war raging in Vietnam.¹

And Paul Simon gazed out across the East River from the window of his New York apartment and he sang the opening lines he'd had for over a week.

- *'When you're weary/Feeling small/When tears are in your eyes/I will dry them all.'*

Even if you haven't recently experienced the death of a loved one, can't you identify with that? It's not just a loved one's death that makes one weary—all kinds of loss can have that effect. And we've experienced a number of losses.

- Are you feeling weary?

I read a first-person essay this week in which the writer reflects on his own experience of being weary, even though he hasn't suffered a loss more monumental than anyone else. And yet, that's part of the point. We're all suffering from this weariness. Here's what he says:

I find myself experiencing this mental-health decline even though I have not fallen gravely ill, or lost my job, or lost my home, or been trapped in a long-term care facility, or endured any of the other major tribulations that currently afflict tens of millions of my fellow Americans. And so I wonder: If the pandemic is this bad for me, how much worse is it for you?²

I identify with what he has said; Do you?

As a Presbyterian pastor happy to be serving in a Lutheran congregation, I meet regularly with both Presbyterian and Lutheran clergy. In the past, this has included periodic lunch meetings. In the present COVID times, we have met via Zoom. I'll be on a call with Lutheran clergy this coming week. A week or so ago, I was with Presbyterians. At a lull in the conversation, I told them, "I'm tired. I'm doing all the right healthy habits to care for myself—regular walks, getting outdoors, time with colleagues, time with family. . . My family is doing fine and I'm not in any kind of crisis. I'm just tired."

- **In the words of Paul Simon's song, *I am weary*, and I imagine you are, too.**

After this person wrote this first-person essay describing his own weariness, he spoke with Dr. Erica Martin Richards, who is a psychiatrist and a medical director at the Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC, as well as a professor at Johns Hopkins University.

¹ Summarized from a description by Bill DeMain, "The story behind Bridge Over Troubled Water by Simon & Garfunkel" posted November 4, 2020. <https://www.loudersound.com/features/story-behind-the-song-bridge-over-troubled-water-by-simon-garfunkel>

² Thomas Lake, "Are you OK? I'm not." Posted Jan 22, 2021 at CNN.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/22/opinions/mental-health-pandemic-the-distance-lake/index.html>

- "Everyone's struggling," she said. Her patients are sicker and more anxious than usual. Research and observation tell her that other Americans are having a very hard time. (It's not just me and it's not just you.)

Themes of Identity and Call

Two weeks ago, we talked about themes of identity and call as we read the scripture texts describing the baptism of Jesus, God's beloved son, with whom God is pleased (Mark 1:11).

Last week, the lectionary presented us with texts with similar themes as we talked about the call of the young boy Samuel and the role of his mentor Eli in helping him hear and understand that call. We talked about the difficulty of living out one's call—that sometimes in scripture people flee God's call, as Jonah initially did. Today's designated first reading from Jonah declares "The word of the LORD came to Jonah a *second* time. . ." and this time "Jonah set out and went to Nineveh. . ." (Jonah 3:1, 3). He went, but he was still reluctant.

And sometimes, after their initial surprise or wonder or expressions of unworthiness, we see that those who God calls are more receptive. We talked about Mary, the mother of Jesus, who said "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38). And we talked about Samuel's own response, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Last week, we talked about our own discernment process here at Good Shepherd and how that has led to our being a *Reconciling in Christ* congregation and how we are seeking to live out our welcome statement in response to God's call.

Over the last 3 weeks, the lectionary has jumped around a bit, drawing readings from different gospels: 2 weeks ago, the gospel text was from Mark 1, then last week we jumped to the call of the disciples in John, and this week, we go back to Mark 1 and the call of the disciples. We've jumped around in terms of the texts from which we have read, but across the Old Testament and gospel texts, now for the third week in a row, we have common themes of God's call and people's response to that call.

Jesus Calls the Disciples in Mark

As we return to Mark chapter 1, today's text points us to Jesus' call of the disciples. There are lots of things we could focus on and draw out of the passage:

- What happened to John and why he was arrested (v. 14). (See Mark 6:17-29).
- The overlap between John's message and ministry and that of Jesus and what John's arrest signals about Jesus (vv. 14-15).
- The focus on time and a particular type of time, God's time (Greek *kairos*), which means an opportune or pivotal time (v. 15).
- Jesus choosing fishermen—ordinary folks (vv. 16-20) and imagining what it might mean to *fish for people* (v. 17).
- The compelling nature of the call. It happened *immediately*, for instance. The word is used twice.

- First, Simon and Andrew responded *immediately* (vv. 16-18).
- Second, *immediately* Jesus called James and John (v. 19-20).

I'm intrigued by these places to explore, but in light of what we have initially acknowledged about the collective weariness that we are experiencing, I'd like to point us to another aspect/feature.

Jesus Called Them Together

Last week, we mentioned a couple things about call or being called:

- There can be the initial hesitancy or resistance.
- A call can also just be challenging or difficult. Last week we talked about how it must have been difficult for Samuel to relay God's message to Samuel, his mentor, because there were painful consequences for Eli and his two disobedient sons.

The weariness many of us may be experiencing right now may also be an occasion in which we wonder, "Can I live out God's particular call to me?"

Out of all the things we could say and dig into in this passage, here's what grabs me this time:

Jesus called them **together**. He didn't call them individually or to serve alone, by themselves. Jesus called brothers Simon and Andrew. Jesus called brothers James and John.

"God knows, Jesus knows, [that] we cannot do discipleship on our own. We cannot do life on our own. We cannot live into our vocations, our truth, on our own. We cannot follow Jesus on our own. We need each other."³

We need advocates and mentors. We need peers and colleagues. We need friends and neighbors. We need community and camaraderie.

Jesus calls us as disciples, saying, "Follow me." Part of that trust to develop as we respond to that call is to recognize that in divine love, God invests in a relationship with us and provides a community in which we can nurture our relationship with others.

One of the most moving elements of last week's service for me was the video clip inserted in the sermon of the young adult from the St. John's Lutheran congregation in Jacksonville, FL (from the *Reconciling Works* video.)⁴

- Taryn spoke of how the church congregation has walked alongside her during difficult times: "It has warmed my heart so much to see them on the front lines. My own family wouldn't do that for me. It's a lifesaver. It's a moment when you feel what's God's love truly is."

When I was growing up, I had rich relationships with my grandparents, most of whom lived through my college years. As I matured, it was a joy to get to know them adult-to-adult. That's a gift my own kids haven't been able to experience with *their*

³ See Karoline Lewis "You are Never Alone," reflection on this text from *Working Preacher* posted January 14, 2018. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=5044>

⁴ YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/q7ujMW0i9F0?t=281>

grandparents: Because of physical distance and then deaths, my own kids have never known their grandparents in the same way I got to know mine.

I had special teachers, athletic coaches, and leaders and pastors from my church who invested in me. I'm grateful for them and grateful for those who have been in those sorts of roles in my own kids' lives, both within and beyond the church.

When we are "feeling weary" and when Jesus' call to follow feels daunting, let us be reassured that Jesus does not call us to live and serve alone, but to be together.

By God's grace, may we trust and also directly see that God calls us to be together and provides others around us who accompany us in this call to follow or call to discipleship.

Who is like Andrew or Simon to you? Who is like James and John? With whom have you enjoyed mutual support in the way that relatives Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of Jesus, provided for each other?

When Thomas, the writer of the essay I mentioned, spoke with Dr. Richards, the psychiatrist, medical director, and professor, she offered some reassuring and practical guidance:

- Tell your friends you love them. Tell them your troubles and listen to theirs. Show up for those family Zoom calls, whether or not you feel like it.
- "There are studies that show the importance of smiling," she said. "The importance of prayer. The importance of exercising." She regularly does all three.

Thanks be to God that we do not follow alone.