

# The Call

## Matthew 4:18-22

### September 3, 2023

You may not know it and you may not feel it but you are an answer to prayer. In God's wisdom and mysterious ways of working all things to the good of those that love Him and that are called according to His purpose... you... are an answer to prayer. It is not by accident that you are a part of this community of faith called First Congregational Church. You have been divinely placed here among these fellow believers for such a time as this to accomplish something wonderful for God. As a child of God, saved by grace you have been called specifically and have been ordained **for such a time as this** to be God's hands and feet in this place to touch lives and be a blessing.

It is not by chance or fate that I am here as your pastor at this time in the history of First Congregational either. God's calling has brought me here to partner with you in ministry.

**But for us to take full advantage** of the opportunities and possibilities that God has planned for us we must not be content, nor comfortable; nor expect the person next to us or on the other side of the sanctuary to offer service that God is asking of us as individuals. **This means each of us has a responsibility** to make ourselves available to be used by God somehow and some place within the ministries of our community of faith.

A life in Christ is a life under obligation. **Ooo, that is a nasty word isn't, especially in church.** However, the Apostle Paul used it when he said, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks" He didn't see himself as a volunteer. He was under orders.

**In church, when we use the term volunteers**, we imply that Christian service is a matter of choice. But if we truly understand the nature of calling, or Jesus' words, "Come, follow me" and our acceptance of those words we should realize that there is no choice, there is obligation. As children of God, disciples, members of this community of faith, we need to understand that we are not volunteering. **No, we are called and sent** to serve by Christ due to a moral imperative of God's providence. We are under obligation to be servants within and outside our community of faith.

In the Matthew passage this morning we are reminded of how Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to become his disciples. **There on the shore of the Sea of Galilee** these 4 men were doing what they did everyday of their lives. They had already been out in the boats fishing and returned with their catch; and were probably mending nets and getting them ready for the next day's work. This was what their life was all about; they were fishermen because their father was a fisherman as was his father before him, as it had been for generations. **That was the expectation.** They were fishermen and always would be...or so they thought. On that fateful day Jesus came walking down the shore, right into their lives and everything changed.

**When I was a freshman in college** I made the decision to go into full-time Christian ministry. I had felt God was calling for some time but it wasn't until a revival at church that I made that decision public. I was so excited and I went home that night and told my parents. My dad looked at me and said, "Chris, were sorry to hear that." I was crushed; I couldn't believe that my parents could actually feel this way. I looked at them and replied, "I'm sorry that you feel the way you do, but this is what I know God wants me to do." They didn't get it; their expectations for me were different. When I came home again several weeks later I found a new Bible on my bed and written on the inside cover was, "Chris, we are very proud of you. Love, Mom & Dad." My parents do not express their feelings and are people of very few words; so those words spoke volumes. It took a while but they got it.

Our lives are full of jobs, families, and friends; with all of that come responsibilities and expectations, we cannot get away from them. As Christians the call to serve within a community of faith isn't over and above those responsibilities and expectations but fall within and among them. It is a part of who we are and what we do.

**Not only were the lives of those four fishermen** going to change but they were going to change the world as well. Life on this planet was never the same after Jesus and his disciples started ministering. Jesus' ministry continues through us today, but many Christians feel that they aren't qualified to serve. If you think you are not qualified to **do ministry think these** that are in the Hall of Faith:

Moses Stuttered  
David's armor didn't fit  
John Mark was undependable  
Hosea married a prostitute  
Amos only had experience as a fig tree pruner  
Jacob was a liar  
David had an affair  
Solomon had too much money  
Abraham was too old  
Timothy had ulcers  
Joseph was a nuisance  
Paul was ugly  
Peter was a coward  
Lazarus was dead  
John was self-righteous  
Jesus was homeless  
Naomi was a widow  
Jonah was disobedient  
Miriam was a gossip  
Gideon & Thomas were doubters  
Jeremiah was suicidal  
Elijah suffered from depression  
Paul was a murderer  
So was Moses  
Not to mention David  
John the Baptist dressed funny  
Martha was a worrywart  
Samson needed a haircut  
Noah had a drinking problem  
Moses had a short fuse  
Zacchaeus was short  
David was only a teenager  
So was Mary, the mother of Jesus  
And so was Daniel

The fact is none of us are really qualified to serve God. Unqualified people are called to serve because the only way they can be successful in their ministry is to completely depend on God. Throughout history God has used the most unlikely people, the most ordinary people to do the most extraordinary things.

**We are all gloves;** gloves are a common, ordinary item in the winter or when we work in the yard. Amazingly, this glove can do all sorts of things...pick up a book, wave goodbye, scratch our head, pat someone on the back.

But this glove can do nothing if I take my hand out of it. All it does is lie there. I can yell at it...glove, get up and scratch my head. It doesn't work. I can try to teach it lessons...look, here in chapter 3 of the glove handbook (get it, glove handbook?). It won't help. A glove can do nothing on its own. Without my hand in it this glove is nothing more than an ordinary piece of cloth.

So it is with our lives. It is only when we live with the Spirit of Christ in our lives that we live with purpose and significance. When we accept the call to serve God we step out in faith, empowered by the Spirit of Christ within us to do amazing, wonderful, incredible things that will make a difference in the lives of others. We are all just ordinary people who become extraordinary in the hands of God. God calls and empowers each of us to do extraordinary things.

**The scripture tells** us that, "at once", with no hesitation, without asking permission from their father Zebedee, without finishing the job James & John left their boats, dropped their nets and followed Jesus. Dropping our nets and following Jesus isn't always as immediate for us as it was for these men. Dropping our nets and following Jesus is a scary thing. Stepping out into uncertainty isn't easy.

While the call to "Come follow me... and be a deacon" or "Come follow me...and be a Sunday school teacher" or "Come follow me... and serve on the worship or admin Team may not be easy to accept, the call does come within a safe environment. The call to serve comes within your community of faith where you have the support of fellow Christians. Soon we will vote on lists of people that have agreed to serve in areas of ministry. By affirming those people, we as a community of faith are saying that we recognize their call and will love and support them with our prayers, the giving of our finances and time. This creates a safe place to serve God within this community of faith.

While this may be a safe place to serve we ought to count on Jesus' call to "come follow me" to take us out of our comfort zones. You have heard the old saying, "Give a man a fish and feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and feed him for a lifetime." If Jesus' call to Andrew, Peter, James and John had been a call for them to serve him in their comfort zone he would have asked them to establish the Sea of Galilee School of Fishing. They would have taught people how to provide for themselves while at the same time telling them about the love of God. Jesus didn't do that He took them as far away from their comfort zone as possible.

**Sure, God** does call some folks to serve within areas of comfort. But most often the call to "come follow me" stretches us, pushes us so our faith roots go deeper and grow stronger. I met Jamie and Natalie while I was serving on staff of a Methodist church in Maryland. It was their home church. Then the sun, moon, planets and stars all aligned, Jamie and I fell in love and after I gave Natalie a puppy she thought I was ok too. About a year after we married God began to stir within me that it was time to consider ministry in another place. The way Baptist churches "call" a pastor was completely foreign for these two Methodist girls. Besides that, it would mean moving away from everyone and everything they ever knew. Their lives would be completely uprooted. It pushed them miles out of their comfort zones. It was a difficult time for all of us but as we look back now we see how God was faithful and how it bonded our family and forced us to trust each other and God in ways we had never had to. We cannot imagine our lives now apart from hearing that call and being faithful to it.

As Christians the truest testament of our faith is the way we live our lives and living our lives within our comfort zone requires no faith. The call of "come follow me" is a call to a deeper more submissive attitude and faith.

**There was a college student** who was struggling in many areas of his life. He spent a lot of his time frustrated and angry. When he couldn't stand it any longer he went to the small chapel on campus and paced up and down the aisles, slapping the back of the empty pews. He yelled and raged at God.

“God you created this world...what could you possibly have been thinking? Look at all the pain, suffering and problems that people face. Everywhere I look all see is hurting people!”

Finally, exhausted, he sat in the front pew with his head down. He lifted his head and he said, “It’s all such a mess. Why even I could make a world better than this one.” He was shocked to hear a voice reply, “And that’s exactly what I want you to do.”

**The call to come follow me** is a personal and intimate call from the lips of Jesus to each one of our hearts to follow and trust Him and make our world better. God wants to use our ordinary lives and do something extraordinary. What we have to remember is that Jesus’ view of extraordinary and our view of extraordinary can be two different things.

To Jesus:

- Changing a baby’s diaper while their parents are in worship or Bible study is extraordinary.
- Making a casserole for a family that has lost a loved one is extraordinary.
- Cleaning out the gutters or small jobs around the church is extraordinary.
- Driving the bus so folks at the Chesapeake can come to church is extraordinary.
- Running the sound board for worship is extraordinary.
- Making coffee so the church can spend time in fellowship is extraordinary.
- Serving our community of faith by doing hospital and homebound visits as a deacon is extraordinary.

All of this and so much more I didn’t mention become extraordinary when done in the name of Jesus. There are incredible, wonderful opportunities here at North Riverside for each one of us and Jesus is calling to us...come follow me.

Amen