

“_____, _____!”
I Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; John 1:43-51
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In the fall of 1977, I began as a freshman at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington. I can't tell you how excited I was. I was thrilled to be moving so far away from home, to move to a new city in a new state, and to begin my studies in college. At the time I was a Biology major, because I was convinced that God was wanting me to do something in biology. I had taken just about every science class my high school had to offer, not just the regular science that everyone took. So I knew more than the old definitions of the scientific disciplines: if it's green and it stinks, it's Biology; if it smokes or explodes, it's Chemistry; if it doesn't work, it's Physics. I had taken all of those, but I also took Botany and Water Biology and those specialized classes too. I loved biology—I was sure that God wanted me to either be a doctor or to work with the forest service—I hadn't decided yet, or really, God hadn't made it clear to me yet which of those options was going to be my career.

So I started my freshman year at Whitworth taking Biology for majors and calculus and those kind of things that one needed to take if one was thinking about medical school or about graduate school in biology. That's when things started to go wrong. Oh, I did ok in the classes, long lectures about biochemical processes, time spent in the field graphing the organisms that one could find in a square yard of forest floor, mercilessly killing fruit flies so I could make them part of a microscope slide. But things started to go wrong because I was bored. Really bored. I couldn't imagine myself doing things like this for the next five to seven years that medical school or graduate school would take or for the rest of my life. What was I doing? What was God doing?

Somehow I got talked into taking a class on the New Testament. It was a night class, it met from 7-10 each Monday night, right during Monday Night Football. The professor was old—probably the age I am now, but he had something wrong with one of his eyes and it wandered, so it always looked like he was looking off into the distance and never looking directly at you. And he lectured for all three hours

—about the Greco-Roman world, the language and culture of the New Testament, the documents that made up the 27 books we call the New Testament, and people all around me were nodding off as he spoke. Except for me. I was enthralled. I couldn't get enough of it. And later that spring, a friend and I started to volunteer with a local church, leading their 7-8th grade youth group, and I remember feeling amazed that people actually got paid to do things like this: to work with youth, to study the Bible, to pray, to learn, to teach. Sometime that first summer after my freshman year I spoke to one of my friends from college who happened to be a bit older and way wiser than me. I remember saying to him, "I'm beginning to think about changing my major. I'm thinking that maybe I might want to switch to a religion major and go to seminary to study to be a pastor." And he looked at me like I was a bit crazy. And then he said, "Of course that's what you should do. All your friends know that. We've known it for a long time. I don't know what you thought you were doing majoring in Biology."

When people ask me how I was called to the ministry, how God called me to be a pastor, that's the story I tell them. Unlike Samuel, I did not hear a voice calling me in the night, "Mark, Mark!" Unlike Philip, I did not have Jesus come and find me and say, "Follow me." But when I first started in seminary, the committee that oversaw my education, the Presbytery of Boulder's Committee on Preparation for Ministry, required all of us seminarians to write a Statement of Call. This was a statement about why we believed that God was calling us to the ministry. I'm sure I wrote some version of this story: my interest in the Bible, my love for the church, the confirmation of people I knew and trusted. This was what God used to call me to the ministry.

How did God call you?

You are called, just as much as I am. Each of us has a vocation. Each of us has something to which we are called. Vocation comes from the Latin word "vocare" which means "to call." It might be as a pastor, a minister of Word and Sacrament. It might be as a secretary. It might be as a politician, it might be as a lawyer or a teacher or sales clerk. God calls all of us.

You may have noticed the strange title to today's sermon, _____, _____. That's not because I didn't

know what to put in there. I know exactly what goes in those blanks. Your name. Just as God called to Samuel,--Samuel! Samuel! Just as God called to me through my studies and my circumstances and my friends, so God calls to you. God calls your name in one way or another. But what is God calling you to do? What is your vocation?

Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,

Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief,

Doctor, baker, fine shoe-maker,

Wise man, madman, taxman, please,

How can I know just what to be?

Please stop and give advice to me.

So says the old rhyme and the old song by the Yardbirds. How did you know? How did you know what your vocation was? How did you know to what God was calling you?

A call comes not just to ministers or missionaries or prophets. God has something in mind for you too.

It may be to teach or to run a business or to be a doctor. It may not be the same thing your whole life.

But he calls all of us. And just like Philip and Nathanael, our first call is to follow Jesus no matter what we are doing. We can follow Jesus as a teacher. We can follow Jesus as a doctor. We can follow Jesus as a custodian. Our first call, before we decide how to make a living in the world, is a call for how to live in the world—as a disciple of Jesus Christ. That's what God calls you to be, that's what God calls me to be. His first call to us, after we hear our name, is "Follow me."

Think back to 1955. The place: Montgomery, AL. The issue is forced segregation on city buses. Local pastors are gathered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church--strategizing. Rosa Parks has recently been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. Her trial will be coming soon.

What do they do? Who has an idea? How should the community respond?

A lot of ideas go back and forth, but nothing clear emerges. Until--the most unlikely thing. The young pastor of the church, new to town, unknown to the city fathers (and, some say, not yet intimidated by them)--a guy in his 20's--raises his hand. Not one of the pastors who has been there for years, but someone young, new, with no experience says that he will help lead the boycott of the city buses. They have a leader. Martin Luther King Jr. was 26 years old that year. Our youngest child is 26. I can't imagine someone that young leading such a movement. But Dr. King did not raise his hand that day because he wanted to lead a movement. He did not raise his hand because he wanted to be famous and have a national holiday in his name. He probably didn't even raise his hand as a pastor. He raised his hand because he knew his first call is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. His faith called him. "Martin, Martin." --Follow me. Mark, Mark--follow me. Fill in your name. Follow me.

When you decide what kind of teacher to be, you are first a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you decide what kind of parent to be, you are first a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you decide how to run your business, you are first a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you decide how well to clean the floors at your job, you are first a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you decide how to treat your co-workers, you do it as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It's hard to follow Jesus sometimes, to be his disciple. Too often the Reign of God enters our world with a cost. Dr. King knew this, too.

Several years after he had raised his hand that day in 1955, he found himself in jail in Birmingham, Alabama. From the unlikely location of that jail, he wrote about a letter he had just received from a white brother urging caution, who said:

"All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but. . . The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth."

Dr. King responded: "Such an attitude stems . . . from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually . . ." he said, "Human progress . . . comes through the tireless efforts of (persons) willing to be co-workers with God . . ."

"... Early Christians entered a town . . . in the conviction that they were 'a colony of heaven,' called to obey God . . . Small in number, they were big in commitment . . . By their effort and example they brought an end to . . . ancient evils . . ."

"... The time is always ripe to do right."¹

Martin Luther King, who we celebrate this weekend, helped a whole generation see where the ways of heaven begin to get an unlikely foothold on this earth. He helped us remember that walking with Jesus means working for justice--revealing in our midst already a world where love reigns, a realm of God's shalom--of wholeness--where nothing's broken and no one's missing, where a table is spread and all are welcome.²

¹ King, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther, Jr. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, April 1963

² Watkins, The Rev. Sharon. *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*. Day 1.org. January 1, 2012