

How does Christ Call?

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

We are blessed by the word of God.

In this scripture, Jesus moves away from the turmoil around John, and the ancient prophecy was fulfilled. Light has dawned for those who sat in darkness. The light was finally dawning for Jesus and his ministry. However, at this time, Jesus was still delivering John's proclamation, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near." There is one thing to do before Jesus begins HIS ministry of proclaiming "the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." He gathers the Twelve Disciples.

As I have grown and prayed and studied, this story of the calling of the twelve disciples has been pushed and pulled and reshaped. It has moved and shifted in application to my life and meaning for the redemption of God's world. It has been a point of new questions and new answers all along the way. The 'what?', the 'why?' and the path of the disciples is, of course, at the core of much thinking because the risen Jesus instructed his disciples:

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Who are disciples? What is the job of disciples? Can I become a disciple? How do I know if I'm a disciple. Those questions led me to reflect on my journey of understanding 'disciple'.

My first understanding was, "Isn't this nice? Jesus found twelve poor, simple, yet special men to come along with him, help him talk to people and learn about what he had to say. That made sense to me. The disciples follow and change the world!

Then, I studied in a Christian tradition that saw this journey of the thirteen men as an analogy. The call of the disciples begins with "REPENT for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near". The twelve disciples represented twelve faculties of humans that are available to us to "Repent" ... to change ... to turn towards a life the

positions us in the Kingdom of Heaven. The twelve faculties, or capabilities available to us to for changing, are Faith, Strength, Love, Will, Understanding, Wisdom, Zeal, Renunciation, Power, Imagination, Order, and Life. These faculties being represented by the Disciples are present throughout the story of Jesus the Christ. Interestingly, the first four faculties to arrive are Peter as Faith, his brother Andrew as Strength, John as Love and James as Wisdom ... the foundation of all of our movement to change or repentance... always beginning with Peter as FAITH. That made sense to me. The disciples follow and change the world.

Then I dug a little deeper and discovered that the disciple of Jesus, more often than not, stumbled around stepping on the teachings of Jesus, not understanding what he was trying to explain, and appearing quite dull. Although that was a pretty distressing change of view, that made sense to me. The disciples still, evidently against all odds, change the world.

Then, I dug a little deeper and was made aware of the plight of women in the first century. I understood that men 'dropping their nets' to follow Jesus ... walking away from their livelihoods and their responsibilities toward their wives and children would almost certainly mean destitution for the women and children. OH MY! The story does not tell us of the conversation between the disciples and their wives.

You are doing what? You're following an itinerant preacher to who knows where? Why not all the other itinerant preachers that have wandered by? (there were many people claiming Messiahship in the first century) What do you think you are doing deserting us?

In this light, for these twelve men to give up everything to follow the call of Jesus must have been incredibly profound, life altering moment for them REPENT for the Kingdom of Heaven in near! The sky opening, dove descending, thunder clapping kind of epiphany that moves mountains. They must have been overwhelmed in this big dramatic moment ... The CALL TO FOLLOW! That made sense to me. The disciples followed and changed the world.

Then I learned a little more and understood the response of the call from Jesus to be of those who had 'ears to hear'. I understood that those that were ready enough, fed up enough ... fed up with the oppression of the Romans, and everyone else who had oppressed them for time in memoriam, fed up with Roman peace that was maintained by cruelty, aggression, and brutality. When Jesus called, "metanoia in Greek, T'shuva in Aramaic (because by now I've started adding Greek and Aramaic interpretations to my 'delving'). They yearned for a better life and followed the man who was offering "the kingdom of heaven". The disciples followed and changed the world.

Then I dug a little deeper. The prophet Isaiah talks about the LIGHT OF GOD. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. And the Psalms tell us, "The Lord is my light and my salvation;"

Now I understand that the entire process of gathering the Twelve as a gift of the LIGHT of God. I saw God's light as the description of the intelligence that spawned all creation. God does not simply HAVE intelligence. GOD IS INTELLIGENCE. So when Paul is demanding that the people of the church in Corinth be united in the same mind and same purpose, he is talking about being operated by, run by, the intelligence that is God. Not human intelligence for protection and winning against other humans, but THE CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE THAT IS GOD. That is the truly pure intelligence that can create the perfect creation. AND ONLY that intelligence.

The intelligence of God, described as LIGHT, helps us be aware of all the things that are hiding in the dark of our world ... oppression, greed, violence... and helps us use the light of that intelligence to see these

destroyers as UNACCEPTABLE. The first step of repentance, is 'noticing' that which we need to turn from. We are in Epiphany and the intelligence that is GOD brings us to an Epiphany. We see the light!

THEREFORE, the first followers of Jesus, the twelve disciples, saw the light because it shone so clearly in Jesus, the Christ. This light, the intelligence liberates and guides. This light that helps us see our error and helps us understand how to behave away from the error. Jesus, being the creation of that light/intelligence simply shines of it and people respond and follow that intelligence. So the Twelve were drawn to the light of the Kingdom of heaven, instantly recognized Jesus as the source of repentance! That made sense to me. The disciples followed and they changed the world.

Then I dug a little deeper and, looking closer at the reality of the time; the culture and interestingly, the weather. First, Peter and his colleagues would not necessarily have been 'poor simple' fishermen. In the first century, fishing in the Gallilee had developed into a major industry. Large extended families formed partnerships. We are told of Jonah and his sons, Simon and Andrew and of Zebedee and his sons, John and James. Both families likely belonged to larger conglomerates. So, prosperous families... perhaps marginalized and oppressed by the Romans, but they were doing ok.

Then we have 'the call'. Jesus calling the disciples is a common event in the ancient Middle East. A person with a grievance would normally invite people to joining him in resolving this grievance. We don't know Jesus' grievance but the disciples certainly did. This explains, in part, why they dropped everything to help him ... not necessarily to follow and learn from him, but to help, because they all understood that there is strength in numbers.

And I learned that this time of year was the dry season. People couldn't travel in the rainy season. The dry season is the time to be out and about. Farmers can leave their fields for a while and fishermen can leave the fishing to others for a bit. This is actually the same reason that people were stepping out to be baptized in our scripture of Jesus' baptism. This is the time of year to pursue group interests. So they were pursuing whatever was interesting Jesus. In this collective culture, the lives of all of these people were continually intertwined. And, these people gathered together all the time. Of this, we 'individuals' need to be constantly reminded. So, when a person was planning to preach something, he would normally have gathered followers because in this time, you would more likely to be believed if you had followers, a clan. So, the call to the disciples and their response to follow was just an everyday, normal, thing to do. No trumpets, or thunderclaps, no destitute wives, just the way things were done around Galilee. That made sense to me. The disciples followed and they changed the world.

I share this analysis of my 'creeping understanding' because as a result of this journey, I have learned two things that I wish to share with you for your reflection.

The first thing I have come to understand profoundly is from that final piece of the 'disciple puzzle'. As so often happens in my study now, in the return to the first century culture to more fully understand what was happening in the world of the people in the Bible, I gain a fuller understanding of the human relationship with Creator God.

As for the disciples tending their nets, Christ shows up and calls us in our everyday, common experiences and unfolds in our lives the ability to change the world, whether we understand or not. We can, and often are, unable to understand. We are idiots and dolts in understanding Christ's call to the Kingdom of Heaven, but it really doesn't matter. The call may very well be a whisper "the kingdom of heaven is near". Our acceptance of

Christ's to "follow" is all we need ... the intention, the faith, the strength, the wisdom and the Love. Christ's presence in our lives is in the ordinary and the simple. Don't bother waiting for the big voice, the big call, the 'hey you'! Practice the discipleship of Christ in the everyday and the simple.

Finally, I share this resolution of today's scripture lesson.

In the Baptist tradition, rather than a Belief Statement, we declare 'distinctives'. These are listed in the "About" section of macneillbaptist.com and they can be found on the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec website. Interestingly, they are not always outlined identically, or applied identically, but are at their heart, agreed upon. This is the Baptist way.

In the Baptist tradition, we uphold Biblical authority through a practice of critical study. We are committed to scriptural study and the authority of that study. And, no matter how we interpret the scriptures, whatever stage of awareness or knowledge we are at, we are often, at that moment, committed to, and trying to live by, that understanding.

And, Baptists also defend individual soul liberty, we affirm that in Jesus Christ all people are equal. Each one is free to be in relationship with God and to express a faith that is not coerced. So, we may be way off base, but if our intention is that we are trying to follow the Christ within us all, we are still heading in the right direction.

As a result of my agreement with Baptist distinctives, and as we share every Sunday morning in our welcome, 'there are many pathways to our relationship with God and we honour whatever pathway people are travelling'. I, then, do not judge myself for having had various, sometimes overlapping understandings of scripture. If I knew ten people who had ten different understandings of scripture, I would honour their understanding. I would speak my truth and allow their relationship with God to support, or alter, their belief. Their relationship with God is the source of their truth. This can be pretty tough sometimes, especially if we experience, and are even persecuted or oppressed under the weight of beliefs of others.

When we encounter someone who understands something in a vastly different way from us, if they are totally wrong by our way of thinking, it is not our business to try to fix them. It is not our job to argue with or correct. It is our job to speak our truth and follow the teachings of Jesus. Love our neighbour .. and that oppressor is our neighbour. For it is only in loving our neighbour that we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ.

AMEN