



“Call Waiting, Etc., Etc.”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Mark 1:14-20

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

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Sermon:

They are known as “call stories”.

If you are among a group of clergy folk, and they are feeling comfortable and safe with one another, you will hear them.

Call stories are usually deeply personal and sometimes, as you listen to the person telling the story, they have a faraway look in their eyes, maybe even a confused look.

How is it that they ended up in service to Jesus?

When did they decide to do the ministry they find themselves in?

To answer those questions, each person returns to their “call story”.

Sometimes, God’s desire is clear, and the response is full and heartfelt and immediate. Oftentimes, it is more like the story of Jonah, reluctant prophet of God who didn’t want the job God called him to. Who took a fast ship in the opposite direction from where God was calling him to. Who spent days inside a dark fish, rethinking things. Who finally went to Nineveh, city of his enemies, preached God’s warning of doom, and succeeded in saving the lives of all the people and animals in Nineveh. Which actually made him mad enough to argue with God.

Not the finest call story! Not like the call story of the famous UCC pastor Yvette Flunder,...she comes from generations of proud African-American Pentecostal preachers. But she is a she. And Pentecostal churches do not allow women preachers. And she is a lesbian, and Pentecostal churches, like the church of her father and grandfather and great grandfather, condemn people like her.

But Yvette knew what burned inside her, and even as a girl, wanted to stand in that pulpit and sing and pray and praise. And preach.

So, she started her own church, ***City of Refuge***, in San Francisco. And it grew and grew and grew. And boy, could she preach!

About 20 years ago, Yvette and her church members discerned the need to join together with other Christians in the body of Christ. And their prayer and study led them to the UCC. Yvette and her church have changed the UCC in California and throughout the country because they heard themselves called into the UCC.

Not every call is a burning within.

Sometimes it feels like an itch that doesn’t go away...like a mosquito bite, small but insistent. Like the beep of call waiting on your phone...you can ignore it, or not.

Sometimes many other things call, and that voice is one among many, and drowned out.

Work, motherhood, my role as friend and community member, even my role as homebuyer and as wife.

I let all of them lull me away from the call that was in my heart, year after year after year. “It isn’t a good time”, I have said that many times. I put that call on hold.

But finally, in spite of all my excuses, I found myself surrounded by people telling me to “Go!”.

And off I went to CA, while my family stayed in WA. To a seminary tucked among the hills of Marin County, California. Leaving my husband, my kindergartner and my second grader, behind.

But as soon as I got there, with my boxes and my suitcase, an old computer and a tiny student apartment to live in...I knew I was answering the call that had been inside of me for always!

And by the end of that summer, we were all living in a little student family apartment, together. We did for three more years, and then, the whole family took off again, for four years in the Nebraska countryside. And then we turned our eyes west again, and let the call take us here.

So what of these men, who get up and leave their families and work, to follow Jesus, and do so “immediately”?

They don’t seem to have waited. It seems that Jesus’ call will not be denied. In all of the gospel of Mark, there is this urgency, this push, to do it Now!

It seems that Jesus answered an urgent hunger within them that could not be put on hold, it was “call waiting” beeping at them, that they needed to reply to!

I believe that replying is life giving. That is why the disciples did it.

And that we can find joy and power in replying to the call that is coming through to us.

The young often go first, they go with energy, “immediately”. These first disciples of Jesus were assuredly young, for they are doing their work under their fathers. This is not their own fishing business; they are still junior members of the family fishing business. They are young and eager.

But the call is not simply for the young.

Jesus will continue to find, and call, men and women of various ages and stages of life.

And they will answer him and follow him.

At any age, at any time, we can be changed, convinced, called by name. C. S. Lewis went from atheist to Christian during one short motorcycle ride. Jonah had his time in the belly of the fish. Paul got blinded.

My husband Jim replied to his call on a weekend retreat for seniors in high school.

When he fell in love with me, and when we subsequently got married against the laws of the Roman Catholic church, we only knew that the call was moving with us, but it had not stopped.

Call stories can be beautiful.

They can be strange.

They can be deeply uplifting and encouraging to others.

And I believe, everyone has a call in their life, sometimes deferred, put on hold, but sometimes that beep, beep of call waiting is answered, and that changes you.

What is your story?

What are you called to?

What have you responded to?

What urging have you been unable to resist?

How has this marked your life?

The call of God: it is to live urgently, intentionally, bravely, eagerly, and yes, even joyfully.

Hallelujah!