



## THE REORIENTATION OF VOCATION 1

One of the chief drawbacks of cooking at the fish restaurant where I once worked was that all of us who worked there smelled like fish. We really were a tight group and did a lot of things together but I suspect that that was much in part because no one else really wanted to hang out with us. We smelled like fish. That is not an attractive smell.

I can imagine that Peter, Andrew, James, and John smelled pretty badly as well. And it would not be hard to imagine that their collective smell kept their connections pretty much confined to their fellow fishermen. Not that there is anything wrong with what they did; fishing is an honest profession, these guys owned their own boats, they were in the family business, and were very acceptable tradesmen by the standards of their culture.

But they smelled. And they were probably pretty isolated because of it. That is until Jesus came along. We don't know if they had a previous relationship, if the fishing disciples had been to hear Jesus preach, or if this was the first time they ever laid eyes on each other. It is a story without any embellishment: Jesus appears to the disciples and asks them to follow him; and they follow. It must have been as much an honor as it was a surprise. Rabbis didn't seek followers, followers sought rabbis. And rabbis didn't look to fishermen for their students.

But Jesus does both. He invites the disciples to become disciples. We wrestle with the concept of election but no one disputes that it

was Jesus that called the disciples not the disciples who called Jesus. It was Jesus' choice. It's true that others followed him on their own volition but it is Jesus that picked (predestined?) his twelve disciples.

That may not be so notable if it wasn't for the fact that he invites *these guys* to be those first disciples. If you were looking to start a world-wide religious movement you can't imagine choosing fishermen to be your protégés and your ambassadors. But Jesus does, for reasons upon which we can speculate but never know. Even if it is because he sees their hearts and sees something there greater than what they do it still says more about the power of Jesus than it does about the potential of the disciples.

The power of Jesus is demonstrated here in this story when the disciples immediately abandon their professions and their possessions and follow Jesus. The majesty and the charisma of Jesus are well represented in this story. There is something about the person of Christ that suggests his greatness, to the degree that those he invites want to join in.

John Calvin thinks that this is a story only for those of us called by Christ into official ministry. But I think Calvin is wrong or at least limited in his understanding of what ministry means. In the world in which we live, the truth is that you are going to be listened to a lot more than I am. Ministers are not trusted very much in our culture, a status we

have too often brought upon ourselves. But if you have cared for people at your work, if you have gone out of your way to demonstrate the love of Christ to those at your school or your office, than they will listen to you for you have earned the right to be heard.

This is a story, I believe, about how Jesus wants to make *all* of our lives deeply meaningful. This is a story about how Jesus wants to transform us and in transforming us, wants to give who we are meaning and what we do meaning. Just as he lifts Peter, Andrew, James, and John out of the routine of their lives and into lives of adventure, Jesus wants to do the same for us.

When Jesus says “follow me” not only is that compelling but it is life-changing. To fall under the sway of Jesus is to fall into a life that is full of the purposes of God. We are no longer defined by our own worth, we are defined by the worth of God. And we join God in his loving work of redemption. Our business is now God’s business. Do you look at your world that way? When you encounter people do you think of them as Christ thinks of them? I believe that to do so is part of what it means to be called by Jesus, to follow him.

Every job that we have should be defined by one thing, according to the principle that we learn here from Jesus. Every job we have should be a place where we love people in the name of Jesus. If you are at home with your kids, love them in the name of Jesus, and model the love of Jesus to others for the sake of your kids. If your work is a place of service to people, don’t serve them for the paycheck, serve them for Jesus. If you are in an office drone in an office full of drones, love on your

drones because Jesus first loved you. Where you are planted, serve Jesus.

Do you know what the difference between a “career” and a “vocation” is? The root of career comes from the same verb as “caren” which was originally a word subscribed to horse-racing and it means to run around and around the track, confined to the never-ending circle no matter how fast you run. The word vocation comes from the word “vocal” and means to be called, to be separated out, for a purpose. It is a word with deep spiritual origin and meaning. Jesus is calling you. He wants to transform your life, including your work, even if you think that work stinks like fish! Yes, Jesus is calling you to follow him, and not to a career but a vocation.