

The Call

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

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This morning, I would like again to focus on our Gospel reading. Last week, I spoke about the need to get an understanding of environment of this event. The call to Peter and friends was not in a vacuum, but rather in the context of friend and family. There is good evidence, that John the evangelist was actually a young cousin of Jesus.

Now although these circumstances impact on the events described, nevertheless there are two things that are important for us to understand - that there was a call by Jesus and equally important, a response by Peter and Andrew, James and John. These two things, a call... and a response.

Now without wishing to oversimplify Christianity, I would like to dwell on these two things as I think that they inform our faith and us....

Let us begin with the concept of call. One of the best ways to understand the Old Testament is through the concept of covenant. Simply put, a covenant is a formalised relationship between a greater power and a lesser power, in which the greater power promises the lesser power certain benefits, in response to the fulfilment of specified conditions.

In these types of treaties, the greater power elicited compliance, by the agreement of mutual self-interest. It was on the basis of these types of relationships, that the great empires of the Middle East were built. Now, there is much that we can learn from the study of covenants, but that will have to wait to another day, but for today I would like to draw on the one simple concept. Covenant is the action of the greater power. The lesser power can only choose to fight or surrender, the greater power can choose to negotiate.

Now why is this important...?

Covenants are found through out the Old Testament. There is the Adamic Covenant (God promised Adam the right to live in the Garden, provided he did not eat of the tree), the Noahic Covenant (God promised he would never again destroy the earth and sealed this with the sign of the rainbow), the Abrahamic Covenant, where God promise that he would be the father of Nations, and the Mosaic covenant, where God would be the God of the nation. We have the Davidic covenant, which promised a descendant on the throne forever, and then there is the new covenant, signed and sealed in the blood of Jesus. The promise of a new relationship, etched onto the hearts of the individual.

In each of these cases the initiator is God. In fact, the very beginning of humanity's disobedience, in Genesis, we read of God seek out Adam and Eve. John the evangelist echoes this in the passage - in John 15:16 - You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit...

The sense here is that God is the active agent, he makes covenants, he seeks, he calls, he chooses. Indeed this is echoed in that famous verse - For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. God actively engaging with humanity. This is the essence

of the promise in Isaiah 45 - I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name; I surname you, though you do not know me.

On the other side, there is the response. We humans are not robots; we are not acting out of compulsion. God has given us the precious gift that we have that free will. That right to choose to respond to, or to reject the offer. This is our choice, and it is what establishes our relationship with him. In the terms of this new covenant, God is not as much about calling a nation, but calling individually each person. We are here today, because we have chosen to respond to this call. At our baptism, our parents may have brought us by faith, but now we choose to respond.

Now it has become fashionable, to speak of the taking of holy orders in the framework of this call. Certainly, in my own case, I am pursuing what I perceive as the clear call of God, in much the same way that the disciples took up the challenge, but this is poor and perhaps elitist theology. For if the understanding of Christianity in terms of call and response is to be accepted then only the ordained and the missionary can be considered to be part of this. Nor can we say that these are special callings, because again this promotes the idea that there are two classes.

I think that it is more useful to see calling, in terms of our baptism. In terms of our joining into the body of Christ, each of us may find different functions in that framework, but each of us is part of a whole. God has called me to do what I do (I am assured of that), but I am just as assured that he has called each of you as well. It is no more or less Christian to follow the calling of being a housewife, a farmer a teacher or a father or a mother. Indeed, I think that we all experience multiple callings. As we age, grow more experienced and change our circumstances, God will call us again to something new

So let us rejoice in the fact that God has called us, each as individuals, and he will keep calling us by name, with new opportunities to serve him. Let us pray you and I that we have the ears to hear him call and recognise the opportunities he gives us daily to serve him.

AMEN