

Called by Your Name

In the 4th Chapter of Matthew there is a very familiar scene and a portion of the same scene is in the 5th Chapter of Luke.

“As Jesus 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 fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.”

In Luke, Jesus had been teaching and healing. He had just finished preaching about the forgiveness of sins. He had healed the sick man at the well, and had said to him, “‘Rise, take up your bed and go home.’” And immediately the man rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all and they were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’”

After this he went out, and he saw a tax collector, named Levi. Levi wasn’t shouting and glorifying God, he was sitting in a tax office. Jesus went into the tax office and spoke to Levi ... and He said to him, “Follow me.”

This is fascinating. Can you see a preacher who is so impassioned with the journey for God, go into a tax office, or in any office for that matter, and say: “Follow me.” You would say: “What is this?” And call the police.

But this is what the text says that Jesus did. Jesus said, “Follow me.” And it is reported in Luke that ...Levi left everything. I love that phrase. That is the only place I see that phrase. Matthew doesn’t say it. Levi left everything. The taxes must have been left in a mess! He left the office and it doesn’t appear he planned to return, for the text says, “...he rose and followed Him.”

The story of the Church is lodged in a deeply personal concept. And it is the concept that persons, diverse persons – fishermen, secretaries, tax collectors, housewives, children, diverse human beings – are called by God to purposes which are often dramatically at odds with what they had been doing up to that time. This repeats itself throughout the Gospel.

I maintain that there is, in you, residue of this knowledge. The text makes one thing clear. You are not being called without first having experienced the

demonstration of the Life-Force that calls you. You are not being called without knowing what God can do, has done, is doing. The text makes that clear. If you want interesting reading, read what happens around the call in the Gospel.

The next thing that is clear is that you are not called collectively. Did you notice that the text said he looked out there and there were two sons of Zebedee and the father. Do you realize that the text didn't call the father? It didn't say why but the fact of life is, in that moment, the call fell on the ears of those who heard their names. That is the meaning of this call. He didn't say, whoever is out there, let's go. No. He was specific "John... Peter."

You are trapped, as am I, by the announcement that God is a calling God. This makes me restless with whatever I have decided that I ought to be doing. I am always restless, because I don't ever want to get to doing it so well that I don't hear my name. God is a calling God, so whatever you think you are into, listen for God, lest you miss your name.

But in a more general way, I want to say that there is not a soul here who hasn't experienced it. I don't think anybody here can deny that there were times, and are times, and hopefully will be times, in your own life, when a high visioning took place, takes place, and will take place. Where something came into your consciousness that wasn't about you, but was about someone else. And where if only but for a second or two you lived in a vastly different imaginative reality of what you might be, do, become. I can spell that out very simply and say you have had dreams more glorious than what the reality is. Everybody has had those moments wherein the Presence dwelling in you surfaced and you came away knowing that 'I have been visited by a great idea about what my life could mean.'

I maintain that is indigenous to our personal existence. I find very few people who say, I'm just so excited with my life, I never knew it could be like this and this is so wonderful. I find very few people satisfied with what they are. Very few people I have run into are satisfied with themselves. I have seen a lot of people who give the facade of being self-satisfied. But don't catch them alone and listen.

I maintain this is because we have been touched with the fashioning of our life by the hand of God. And there is on this mortal flesh eternal longings, yearnings – yearnings that are larger than life on earth. They know that they are called to more than they have been able to become. Yes. Called from the ordinary. Called personally from where we find ourselves. I maintain that there is an intensely private dimension to the religious consciousness. And that private dimension is about you and who you are, and about your uniqueness. You are an altogether special, peculiar, purposeful event. And I will say it to you this way, in church talk, there is a latent, hidden, image of you, that is burdened by the presence of the Infinite Spirit. You hide, as it were, a glory. Not in your bodies, but beyond your bodies. Your name conjures up a reality, that is larger than

body, larger than sight. You hide a latent, potential glory. Every living person and thing hides the mystery of the secret of the Hand of God on his or her own life.

Who are you? Why are we haunted by this Beyondness: that which is other than what is apparent? I maintain that we know that we have been called to more than we have become. And we persist in being tempted, even when we think we have got it together. We are teased by visits from the Spirit. Oh yes, you don't believe in ghosts and spirits, but ghosts and spirits are real. They keep haunting you. Even when you appear to have put it together, you are not satisfied.

And what happens, therefore, is you become spiritual pilgrims. What is the difference between a pilgrim and a tourist? A pilgrim is directed to God. A pilgrim is looking for the Holy Place, so he or she can plant their feet there. A tourist is just looking around. But a pilgrim is one who is looking for that Holy Place where you see yourself becoming what you think you are ordained to be. And you take off, and nobody knows it. You don't discuss it with your family, even your closest friends. You go down the path of Life, which becomes a long, long road, of potential fulfillment. And every now and then, the spirits and the ghosts will come in, and you almost make a move. But by the time you make a move, you have passed all of the available motels. They have closed, and you realize that I can't do it now, I will do it at the next stop. You get on down the road and you find that the next stop is closed. And then you say, O Lord, I don't know what I am going to do. But by the time you get to the next stop, you have made the necessary adjustments. And the pressure isn't upon you anymore.

What I am talking about is what a major author has called "the pressure of Glory" that is on every life here. "The pressure of Glory" – the fact that all of us are called by our Maker.

I maintain, that when you hear your name (and all have heard their name) the visions that conjure up in you about what life could be for you, will either be followed, or you will know the deep agony of self-betrayal. And most people, unfortunately, know that in this life. I have seen too many leaving this earthly existence who knew that they betrayed, not me, not you, but themselves.

Jesus called them by their names. They knew that this was serious; dangerous, yes, but serious. Immediately they left. They knew in a flash that this was of God. Not to answer would be to betray themselves.

I glory in that hour. And I glory in the opportunity that is ours. Every person's soul hides a mystery of what the world could be. Of what men, women, and children might be. Your soul speaks to you in your quietest, reflective moment about the vast dreams for you. Every soul is speaking. And we will be given the opportunity everyday. Most of us will ignore it. Most of us will say, well, if I could have done that earlier in life. There is no time that is too late; there is no time that is too early, to baptize the world with a new demonstration of imagination which

is the outpost of Eternity in history. Your imagination is your earthly hold on Eternity. And all of you have imagination. To the extent that you can imagine something different than what now is – to that extent you participate as an Eternalizing Force in time. That is how powerful you are. And if that imagination allows you to figure out how to respond, you will be like a baptism, an opening, wherever you go.

That is all that Jesus is talking about. You must become involved when you hear the words: “Follow me.” Jesus didn’t say to them: “I just ask you to come and go with me while I figure out where I am going.” Jesus said, “I know where I come from and I know where I am going.”

“Follow me.”

And I say to you – and to us who are lost: do we go? The future of the world is lodged in our answer to those words. The future is that immediate. Do you know where it is? It is in this room. Inescapably tied up in you. You harbor the future. It is in us.

You are called to fulfill God’s creational design. To be partners with the Creative One, in building a world that is One. One. A unified place where God is in charge; where men, women, children live with justice, and righteousness, and holiness, and peace. That is how vast is the design for your life. You are world-changers, by virtue of your soul.

Jesus said: “I want you. Follow me.”