

**Third Sunday after Epiphany**  
**January 25, 2009**  
**Text: Mark 1:14-20**  
**The Rev. David B. Hodges**

Years ago, when I first began to sense that I was supposed to be doing something with my life other than what I was doing at the time, I decided to talk to my dad. I had grown up hearing him and others talk about being called to do certain things and to go certain places, but I realized that I really had no idea what that meant. At the time, I was feeling a tug to something - or away from something -- but I had no idea what it was all about. *So what does it mean to be called*, I wanted to know?

I don't remember exactly what my dad said to me, but whatever it was, it helped in some way. I don't think it was anything profound, but what did seem to be important was my question, which led me into the conversation with him, and later with others, that in time resulted in my being able to identify and accept God's call to me to become a priest. So what does it mean to be called by God?

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me... And immediately they left their nets and followed him* (Mark 1:17-18). Leaving fishing boats, nets, parents, and employees behind, Simon, Andrew, James and John make a decision to do something that will change their lives

immediately and forever. You wonder if they had some contact with Jesus before they did this seemingly radical thing. You wonder if they had at least heard him, or heard of him, but we don't know because there is no mention of it at all. There is nothing more than a call from Jesus to them, and an immediate response to that call in which he wants them to drop everything and follow him.

We know very little about these fishermen that Mark's Gospel says became followers of Jesus *immediately*. What we do know is that there is nothing said about them having special gifts, or particular talents, or special insight, or anything about them being highly intelligent. They appear to have been ordinary working class guys without distinction, other than they are the first that Jesus calls as disciples. After hearing and responding to his call, they and others like them will end up being the ones who will literally follow Jesus from place to place over the next few years. They will be the ones who see him after his resurrection and they will be the ones he talks to about carrying on his work and ministry after he is gone.

I don't think there is any doubt that there must have been times when those four fishermen wondered what they had gotten themselves into and why in the world they said yes. There must have been days when they questioned why they had given up everything they had to

follow this person named Jesus. It appears as if they had no idea where they were going, or what they were being asked to do, or if they would ever be able to return to their homes, their families and their friends.

Nothing in the Bible tells us that they had any idea that the one they chose to say yes to was the one. They didn't know that the one to whom they were committing themselves to follow was the Christ, the Messiah, the one that they and so many others had been waiting for. But in spite of all they didn't know, and in the face of what had to be an incredible amount of uncertainty about the immediate future, they were willing to respond and to follow the call of Jesus.

It is through the Church and our experiences in it and through it that we are able to enter more deeply into a relationship with Christ, who is the head of the Church and the author of our salvation. As he did to Simon and Andrew and to James and John, Jesus is still calling, still inviting, and still asking you and me to do things, to carry out our ministry in the Church, to be his followers, to become part of something that will last forever.

It is only through Christ that we can discover that we are loved, wanted, needed, and that we are truly special. Some of the other things we do and some of the other things to

which we belong are important and serve a purpose, but it is only as people who are willing to say yes and to follow Jesus and to love and obey him that we will find true happiness and a sense of peace in our lives. But as the four fishermen soon found out, there's nothing easy about answering the call of Jesus.

In his address to the annual convention of the Diocese of North Carolina, which took place this weekend, Bishop Curry mentioned a book called Imitating Jesus, written by a priest named Richard Burrige. In his book, Burrige says that imitating Christ means living out the things that Jesus did and said. Being a disciple of Jesus means following him until his footprints and ours become indistinguishable. He refers to the first disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John and says this: *So Jesus' disciples may struggle to follow, but follow they do...* (p. 182).

This morning, we have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the ministry of someone who has just recently been willing to say yes to a call. It is a call that came to Sally Johnston that involves her and her husband Harold. It is a call from God that involves leaving family and friends, and the relative safety and security of their lives and ministries, in order for her to become the Rector of St. Martin's in the Fields in Columbia. After a time of discernment

and prayer, Sally was able to respond to this call from God that came to her through the people of that parish at this time in her life and ministry as a priest.

In the last four and half years, Sally has shared her gifts and talents with us in many ways. She is a thoughtful and dedicated priest, and she has been a wonderful colleague in ministry for Carter Lofton and me, and all of us here at Holy Comforter are going to miss her. But on this day when we say goodbye, we can also say thanks be to God. Thanks be to God because God has called and Sally has answered, and for that we can be truly grateful -- and from it we can also learn a little more about what it means to be called and to respond.

So what does it mean to be called by God? Hearing and responding to the call of Jesus and then following him often leads us to places we don't want to go, or into situations that we might not choose. Hearing and responding to the call of Jesus means that we make choices about how we live, about what we say, about what we do, about how we treat others, and about how we will respond to the demands of the Gospel which are not easy.

Hearing and responding to the call of Jesus and then making a commitment to be a follower has to mean something, or it leads to nothing. Following Jesus is never safe, and it will not always even make you feel better or more secure. But ultimately it's the only thing I

know of that is permanent and really matters. The claim and the hold that Jesus Christ has on your life and on mine is like nothing else and it is to him that we owe our all as we listen for his call to us. Let us pray.

*Lord, you come to the shore of the lake and you call us. You come to the office and you call us. You come to our homes and you call us. You come to church and you call us. Forgive us for the many times when we chose to ignore you and enable us, we pray, to put down all that binds us and keeps us from responding to you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*