

SERMON TITLE: "Jesus 101: Jesus & Vocation"  
SERMON TEXT: Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14; and 3:13-19  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: July 21, 2024, at First United Methodist Church

## **INTRODUCTION**

Last Sunday, we started a new sermon series I'm calling "Jesus 101." We're immersing ourselves in the Gospel of Mark and reviewing the basics of who Jesus was and what that means for us. Last week, we began with "Jesus & the Gospel."

As you can see from the bulletin, today's installment of "Jesus 101" is about "Jesus & Vocation." We United Methodists don't use the word *vocation* very much. In fact, when you first glanced at the title, some of you might have thought I was going to preach about Jesus going on *vacation*. We're in the middle of summer after all, and lots of folks are enjoying some time off from work. And, of course, that's important. Even Jesus did escape sometimes to get away from the crowds and restore his soul.

But, before we get to such times of relaxation, the gospel story offers a call to get busy. Last week we read the first 15 verses of Mark chapter one. That first section included Jesus' baptism, when he saw the Spirit of God descending on him like a dove and he heard God's voice saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Soon after, when John the Baptist was arrested and his message was silenced, Jesus realized that God was calling him to pick up the slack and get to work.

And that's what the word *vocation* means. You can think of it like *voice* or *vocalization*. As the Gospel of Mark so clearly indicates, Jesus heard God's divine voice calling him into the ministry of good news. But vocation wasn't limited to God's call upon Jesus. In today's verses from chapters one through three, we see that Jesus quickly used his own voice to call disciples to join him in God's good work. And, of course, even we are included in this topic of Jesus and vocation.

## **1—THE DISCIPLES' CALL STORIES**

I suspect we're pretty familiar with the call stories of the fishermen. We remember Sunday School pictures of Jesus approaching these men along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. There they were with their boats and nets. Jesus interacted first with Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. To both of them, Jesus voiced the call: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Follow me, and I will change your vocation.

And then just a little farther along the shore, Jesus came upon the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, mending their nets. Again, Jesus spoke up about his need for helpers. He called them to come and assist, and they immediately left their nets, their boats, their father, and their hired hands. They gave it all up to follow Jesus and join him in his work.

From the way this gospel story is presented, you get the impression that the fishermen and Jesus were total strangers until that moment when he called them to come and fish for people. I've always thought it were possible, though, that Jesus could have met them previously. We don't know anything about what Jesus was doing while he was in his teens and 20s. Maybe he had travelled to the Sea of Galilee before. Or maybe Jesus had met those guys at the temple in Jerusalem when they all were there for Passover or other Jewish holidays. But whether the fishermen had ever met Jesus before or not, for some reason they trusted him. They were willing to give up their livelihood and all that familiar work to follow Jesus on a very different journey.

Speaking of journey . . . Are you acquainted with the term *journeyman*? My brother just retired from his work as an electrician. He had a good long career. But, in the beginning, I can remember that he had to go through a journeyman phase of training before he could become a fully licensed electrician. There are also journeymen plumbers, welders, and carpenters. Likewise, Jesus called the four fishermen to follow him as journeymen preachers and healers. As they

apprenticed with Jesus the Master, he prepared them for the day when he would no longer be at their side, and they would be fully empowered to do this work of God on their own.

Besides the blue-collar fishermen, Jesus also called white-collar workers like the tax collector. Mark 2:14 calls him Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Other references call him Matthew. Whatever his name, this man who had collected taxes provided some important skills. He probably was good at record-keeping, and he had useful relationships with a different set of people.

The Gospel of Mark doesn't provide background about the rest of the disciples, but the other gospels fill in a bit more. We know that some of Jesus' disciples had previously been followers of John the Baptist. And Judas Iscariot was a Zealot, which meant that he was willing to take up arms to fight for his cause. It makes sense that Jesus called people from a variety of backgrounds. They were able to bring a great deal of knowledge and skill to their work for God's kingdom. We can assume that some of the disciples Jesus called were older and had gained wisdom from life experience. Others were younger and possibly had more energy and enthusiasm. But each one brought something to ministry that was beneficial.

That's good because Jesus didn't call those men just to sit around and listen to him or even just to walk around and watch him perform miracles. That observational time was essential, of course, but Jesus also called them to get busy working. As we read in Mark 3:14-15, Jesus appointed the 12 as apostles, "to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons." In Mark chapter six, Jesus sent them out two by two, so they could begin practicing their skills of proclamation and healing. At first, those practice runs were to nearby towns and villages. After Jesus' death and resurrection, those missionary journeys took the disciples to distant places.

An example of that was the disciple Thomas. We mostly remember him as "Doubting Thomas" for his doubts about Jesus' resurrection. But later church tradition tells us that Thomas

eventually went as a missionary all the way to India. If a guy who had doubts could then become motivated to travel such a distance from Israel to India to preach the Christian gospel, he surely was a good choice for a disciple. Jesus knew what he was doing when he called Thomas, and Thomas must have brought some wonderful attributes to his vocation of ministry.

## **2—OUR CALL STORIES TODAY**

So, when we consider Jesus and vocation, we first think about Jesus' own call from God and the call that Jesus made upon his original disciples. But we should also recognize that the voice of Jesus continued to call disciples throughout the past 2000 years and is still calling us today.

One way Jesus calls us now is into the vocation of professional, full-time pastoral ministry. Every year, some ministers retire, and every year, some new clergy are needed to enter this field of work. At our recent United Methodist Annual Conference in Casper, Wyoming, we honored retirees, ordained new clergy, and had an altar call for persons to come forward and pray about whether God might be calling them into professional ministry.

In my experience, I've seen Jesus call young people in high school or college, who then focus their studies on religion and the ministry of the church. It's also quite common for Jesus to call an adult who already has worked in some other profession—maybe in the military, nursing, education, or business. That's a little trickier because those second career persons then have to return to school and incur additional costs. But, like the fishermen and tax collector, those second-career pastors bring with them a wealth of life experience.

As a church, we know it's our responsibility to teach Christian faith. But sometimes we forget that it's also our job to raise up leaders of Christians. When we notice that someone has the gifts and graces for ministry, we should allow Jesus to speak through us. We should allow Jesus to use our voice to commend and encourage those persons and suggest to them that God might have some important work for them to do. The vocalization of the call to ministry can come through each

one of us, as we speak words like, “Have you ever thought of going into ministry? I think Jesus might have a career plan for you.” When we speak those words of call, we open up ideas and possibilities and allow Jesus’ voice to be heard.

Of course, Jesus doesn’t call everyone into full-time professional ministry. The vocation or calling that most people feel is to do the best job you can in your own field of interest. If your career is with the IRS, Hill Air Force Base, or Weber State University, you can glorify God in your labors. If your career is repairing appliances, constructing buildings, offering customer service over the telephone, or teaching junior high, you can do God’s work by keeping a positive attitude, practicing good ethics, and fulfilling your responsibilities with expertise. If your calling is to care for your own family and your own home, to be a considerate friend, or to use your spare time as a volunteer, those are important vocations too. In those roles and many more, you have an opportunity to offer a message of graceful, good news to those who are hurting. In all the labors of laity, inside and outside the church, there’s the opportunity to fulfill the vocation of Jesus.

### **CONCLUSION**

Later in the service, we’ll be singing the hymn, “Here I Am, Lord.” The lyrics are based on the Old Testament story of the boy Samuel who heard God calling to him in the night. Samuel responded by becoming a priest.

When we think about Jesus and vocation, we’re talking about hearing and answering a call to engage in ministry in whatever form is right for us. This is a Jesus 101 essential. So let’s embrace Jesus and vocation!