



“CONSIDER *Your* CALL” Sample Sermon

THEY LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED

Luke 5:1-11

Dr. Cecil E. Sherman
River Road Church, Baptist

The text for the sermon comes from the Luke reading. It tells about the call of some fisherman. Luke worked from Mark's gospel. The way Mark tells the story of the call of these fishermen, tests my credulity. There is such compression in Mark, until I don't see how they responded. Jesus is introduced through John the Baptist. There's about that much on the baptism, a sentence on the temptations, and then he walks by the Sea of Galilee and says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." It is as if Jesus had never seen these people before, called them and they followed. Now, the Bible is filled with amazing stories but that's kind of off the scale. The implication is, they had never seen each other before, or at least that is one way you can read it.

Now Luke tells the story altogether differently and helps us. Jesus returned to Galilee after his temptation. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everybody. He went home to Nazareth and was given a cool reception. We talked about that two weeks ago. He went from Nazareth to Capernaum where he taught in the synagogue, healed a man possessed by an unclean demon, and the people were astounded at his teaching. He left the synagogue at Capernaum, went to the home of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. She was suffering from a high fever. Jesus made her well. He then healed other sick people and all of these things happened before our text. Now, you might want to question a fellow who would loan his boat to the guy who healed his mother-in-law. But that indicates a jaundiced disposition. But obviously, Peter had some experience with Jesus and so had the other fellows, and that's the point I'm trying to make.

Now this text is about the radical reordering of a life or lives. It's the time when four men quit fishing and start following an itinerant preacher. How did they do it and why did they do it? Now, we're never going to know the complete answers. There have to be educated guesses. But what influenced them moves us. I'm interested in people responding to Christ's call. Jesus still calls. He needs us and we need to be open to his call. The church is a beggar for the talents of gifted people. God has called more people than have responded. Therefore, I work on the assumption that some of you in my hearing need to hear this as an echo of a call from a higher source and if that be so, we put this service to high purpose.

The anthem that reads, "Giver of every perfect gift," could not be better suited to this sermon. It is beautifully fitted. What was it that caused those people to respond to Jesus? That's where I start. I'll give you five ideas that I see in the text. First, they responded to an attractive, magnetic, and winsome personality. The text begins, "Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him, they wanted to hear the word of God." Jesus was popular. Large crowds followed him. John Broadus said, "The word that best describes the Galilean ministry of Jesus is popularity." That's where they heard him gladly. That's where he didn't teach them like the Scribes and the Pharisees. He taught them as one who had authority. Jesus could do things nobody else could do. He made sick people well, he cast out demons; he could predict where fish were. When you can do things like that, you draw a

crowd. Everybody is attracted to somebody who is so winsome that they can do things. That idea is what the text connotes about the attractiveness and winsomeness of Jesus. Now often, people like me make Christ's service look dull, old, and lifeless. That's my fault, not His. That's not the way He was. He was vital, alive; we would say He was exciting.

Second idea...they saw in Jesus virtue. He was real, honest, and good. When Jesus did a miracle and there were more fish than the boats could haul, what did Peter say? Man, how'd you do that? I should have known where those fish were. I've got to take fishing lessons from you. That's not where it went. It went in an all-together different direction. What Peter really said was moral. He fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me Lord for I'm a sinful man." Now Jesus didn't go away from Peter, he came nearer. Peter's sinfulness did not disqualify him from service. There is something in me that wants to follow goodness and virtue. Goodness has been given a bad name by pretenders and moral policeman. When I was attracted to my wife, there were a number of things to be attracted to. One of them was goodness. I'll bet that's true of you too. When it's done right, there's not much more beautiful than goodness. So, when Peter got real close to Jesus, he compared himself to Jesus and he came out with an honest statement, "Go away. When compared to you I am a sinful man." That's one reason Peter wanted to be around him -it was goodness.

Third idea...everybody's looking for meaning in life. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you'll be catching people." Now, there's not a thing in the world wrong with making a living as a waterman, but by any standard, Jesus raised the bar. His invitation redirected Simon Peter and the other Andrew, James, and John, the other fishermen's lives. He gave them a different, higher, nobler reason to live. Why do kids rally around a cause? We borrow meaning from causes. All of us do. Days and nights spent fishing looked tedious when compared to a life spent with Jesus. He became their cause and He, as their cause, became their reason for being. Now pick your cause with care. Causes are all over the lot. Adolph Hitler gave people a cause and it turned out to be empty, hollow, false, and terribly wrong, but an empty people followed him.

Baker James Cauthen came home from China at the end of World War II. It was July 1945, just at the end. I was just out of high school. My intention was to be an engineer. I was enrolled at Texas A&M. Cauthen lined out a world that was scientifically advanced and we had just dropped a bomb. We were all trying to figure out, What is an atomic bomb? He said, "We're scientifically advanced and if we are not morally competent, we have the capacity to do harm beyond anything previously done." That was truth. He issued a call to work where the need was greatest. That was my call to Christian service and it has ever been my cause. Everybody needs a cause; a cause that raises the bar because it gives meaning to life.

Fourth idea...they began in faith. Think of all the things they didn't know. For instance, they didn't know who Jesus was. They had spent a good deal of time trying to figure out who Jesus was. They followed Him before they got the answer. Further, they knew nothing about the cross, the price they would pay for following Jesus. They don't know that it was off the scale, it's just not mentioned; they didn't know. And, some of them didn't handle it very well when that time came. They had no vision of the church and the part they would play in her founding. That's out there, beyond them, that's not where they're thinking. Becoming authors of a book that would be used 2,000 years later as a text in this setting-they couldn't even imagine it. Think of all the things they didn't know. They didn't know what this would cost them personally; 10, 20, 30, 40 years down the road some of these people died because of a decision they made this day. Do we count them fools for not knowing? Not really. We make them models of faith.

Now let me make some commonplace illustrations. They didn't know what they were getting into when they did this. I've raised this question with you before. Did you know what you were getting into when you got married? Are you kidding? And if you did, did you have any idea what was involved in siring a child, or carrying a child? Now I've seen some people six months after the birth of a child kind of cross-eyed. I never realized - this is the most demanding creature I've ever seen and that's true. Think of all the things you didn't know about what would be involved in the job you do. When I responded to a call to the ministry, I had no idea what would be involved in presiding over a church, a pastor of a sizable church. It involved things I'd never thought about. Now, these faith steps in my life have led to the best parts of my life and I began them unknowing. That wasn't my folly; that's turned out to be my wisdom and in retrospect, what Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't know, doesn't diminish them, it makes them models for us. Every great cause begins in unknowing and a faith commitment to it.

Last idea...they were able to make a clean break with their past. "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed Him." We marvel at the story of the rich young ruler. Jesus asked him to sell what you own and give the money to poor and you'll have treasure in heaven, and then come follow me. Actually, this was pretty commonplace in the New Testament. A few verses after Jesus asked the rich young ruler to give away everything, Peter said to Jesus, "Look. We left everything and followed you." This fellow wasn't being asked to do any more than all the people around Jesus had already done. We don't help Christianity by lowering the price. We don't make it more

attractive. If we're not real careful, we will take more than the trimmings, we'll take the very core idea out of it. It's meant to be expensive.

In 1984, Dot and I spent some weeks in England and one weekend we went out of our way to get on the train and go up to Scotland and go over to the western shore of Scotland and find the little island of Iona. There is a place there that commemorates a remarkable mission of the church in her primitive days. From Ireland, there came a Monk named Columba. He and 12 men left Ireland on a mission to convert the pits, or the Scots to Christianity. They loved Ireland. They loved Ireland beyond all loving and they longed for a day when they could remember. Columba knew his people well, so upon landing on the rocky and barren shores of Iona, Columba said, "Burn the boat," and they did. There was no way home. They had to make it. Whatever we do we're going to do here. Scotland is different for it until this day. For a long, long time, her kings were buried there. Their coronations were from there. Their graveyard is still there, because some people left all and followed. This is not poetry, this is the standard and it always has been from the beginning. If this is saying again something that you have heard from other places, this same Christ may be calling you and this call – this call – is the highest and best and noblest thing that will happen to you whatever. Hear it.