

Grace and peace to you from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Call stories are often dramatic,
as in our gospel reading today where
Andrew and another disciple and then his brother Simon are called.
Simon is not only called, but re-called or renamed by Jesus to be called Peter.
John the Baptist is pretty well-known for being confident of his call –
to prepare the way of the one who is greater than himself.
St. Paul has one of the most dramatic call stories of our tradition –
being a fanatic for Judaism,
blinded by a light, hearing the voice of Jesus and
healed by Peter and transformed to
spread the good news of the Lamb of God to all people.

There are those today who experience some outstanding call stories also.
But not all calls are so dramatic.

A faculty member at Yale Divinity School objects to
romanticizing God's call.

William Muehl contends that many people
come to faith in less dramatic, more ordinary ways.

He points to being required to attend Sunday school as a child.

Or joining the youth group because it provided a social life.

Or you were invited by a significant other,
and though you weren't particularly religious,
you wouldn't have dreamed of saying it,
and you attended so they would still

look starry-eyed at you over the coffee after the service.

Muehl speaks from his experience from

his call as a lay faculty member at Yale's Divinity was not his first choice.

He originally trained as an attorney.

The stress of it all gave him an ulcer.

The doctor had good news and bad for him.

The good news was that by 40 he
would probably be a rich man through his work.

The bad news was that he

wouldn't live past 30 doing what he was doing now.

My own personal calling to ordained ministry was not dramatic, it was more like Muehl's, though without the ulcer. After graduating with a Bachelor's of social work, I wanted to work for 5 years and then return to get my Masters of social work. 5 years came and went, 6, and then 7 and none of the social work programs felt right, or "called to me". But, finally, listening to those who knew me well, I answered a call to seminary study and ordained ministry that had become too intense to ignore any longer.

Not so dramatic a call story. But what strikes me about my call story, the call of others and the calls in the bible we read today is that they are all calls that require change. For me, for William Muehl for Andrew, Peter and the other disciple, the change was vocation. The disciples were called to change more, too. They were called to change who they followed. Disciples of John now followed Jesus. The call they responded to opened up a whole new world to them. A different relationship with God through God's son. A new way of being in the world. It was a life that involved following a wandering preacher, being sent to heal and cure illnesses. They are depicted in the Bible as being an enthusiastic bunch if not entirely understanding of Jesus or his meaning.

And St. Paul was called to change not only his tactics, but also his deeply held beliefs about God. Being well-known as a leader in the Jewish community this change could not have been easy for him.

I have a friend who tells me that 'trying to embrace change is like trying to embrace a porcupine'.

We often focus on the call stories of individuals,

but let's not forget the Isaiah reading for today.
The whole nation of Israel is called to change from
existence only for themselves as God's chosen people to
being a light to all the nations,
to take salvation to the corners of the earth.
And Paul's letter to the Corinthians spread those beliefs far and wide.
God called that community in Corinth together to be church for the world.

It's a call that stands today:
a call for us to spread the love, grace and mercy of God seen in
Jesus whom John the Baptist proclaimed was the Lamb of God,
the one to take away the sins of the world,
not by military might,
through conquering and overpowering,
but through humble service, love, and forgiveness
in the pursuit of justice and healing.

The long road toward equality and justice for all is still being walked.
Tomorrow we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.
Martin Luther King had a calling.
He challenged our country to come to a new way of thinking.
This change was not easy.
This country was divided,
and still continues to be wounded by racism and prejudice.
Often the places that God calls us to
make us feel as if we are trying to hug that porcupine.
God's calls can mean changing our attitudes and beliefs,
our way of being in the world.

Even when change is good it can feel prickly.
Like the change one goes through with retirement and
finding a new pattern for your weeks,
discovering what new calling God has in store for your days now.
Or the change of becoming a parent or
moving out on your own.

Our church has, at times, been pushed toward change too.

The ordination of women in this congregation was certainly a call that challenged people to change how they thought. At this time, a call to stand with immigrants and refugees is sounding across our nation.

As church in this time and place,
we are all called to share our varied gifts united by Christ the Lord.
Charged with a single great commission from above that
we plan and work together to share Christ's love with all people.
Called to show God's surprising grace to the world.
Called to work toward the healing and reconciliation that
was begun by the one who was called to be
the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
Called to live in hope.
This is our calling.
Come and See.
Amen.