

“HEARING THE CALL: Where Are You Going?”

Mark 1:4-11 and Mark 1:14-18

Baptism of the Lord Sunday, January 7, 2018

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Today we begin a series, “Hearing the Call” to help us recognize and respond to God’s call in our lives. It’s also the day on the liturgical calendar known as Baptism of the Lord Sunday, when we remember the baptism of Jesus and reflect on our own baptisms. You’ve heard the gospel account of Jesus’ baptism. Immediately after that, he is tempted in the wilderness, and begins his ministry. Baptism leads into ministry and purpose.

So Jesus proclaims the new reality of God’s Kingdom and calls people to repent, which can mean to turn around as well as to change one’s mind. He calls fishermen, giving them a new task and new purpose, inviting them to join him in his ministry.

Listen for the account of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee,
proclaiming the good news of God, and saying,
“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent and believe in the good news.”

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon and his brother Andrew
casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

Jesus said to them,
“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”
Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

When I was learning to drive as a 16 year old, I remember getting some very helpful advice from my older brother John. After I had jerked the steering wheel too sharply a few too many times, he encouraged me to just stay alert and make minor adjustments, telling that the by just turning the wheel a little bit, you can get the car back on track.

I've remembered that advice over the years—for driving and for living my life. I think this advice is relevant for us as we think about the word repent. Stay alert and make minor adjustments.

For most of us, most of the time, our repenting means making relatively small adjustments to get back on track, to get back to where God wants us to be.

Getting back on track presupposes that we know where we are going. Stephen Covey famously encouraged people to begin with an end in mind. To know where you are going.

Do you know where your life is going? Do know where you want to go? Do you know what kind of person you are called to be?

My hope for the month of January with this series on Hearing the Call is that we can all hear God's call in our lives. Some of us need to hear it again, some of us may need to hear it for the first time.

Jesus came to proclaim this new reality of God's kingdom and to invite people, to call people, to change directions, to make minor or major adjustments, and to focus on a new goal. He gave those first disciples a new purpose, a new goal: fishing for people, serving people, loving people.

I believe that call continues for us.



If you keep your goal in mind, you'll be ok. If you want to get from A to B, you focus on B, and make adjustments on the journey.

But if you start off going a little bit in the wrong direction, you could end up far from your goal.

And if you keep turning away from your desired goal, you'll end up very far away.

So the little things we do on a daily basis, if they lead us a little bit in the wrong direction can become problems if we don't stay alert and make minor adjustments.



If we do stay alert and listen and respond, then we find our way as people, as Christians. We hear the call and live out our potential as God's people.

One way of thinking about this is to ponder what you want to be said at your funeral. I wrote a little about this in January newsletter, and I think it's a good question to ponder at the beginning of the year, or really anytime.

Do you want to be remembered as a great shopper who acquired lots of stuff? Or great at playing video games, or at spending hours on social media? Or at being a complainer who never tries to make things better? Probably not, right? That's not your calling. Those things have their place, but they're not your calling.

Your calling involves fishing for people--making a difference in the world, in a way that only you can, given your unique life circumstance.

Oprah Winfrey put it well, saying: "I believe there's a calling for all of us. I know that every human being has value and purpose. The real work of our lives is to become aware. And awakened. To answer the call."

Some people are fortunate enough to find their calling in their professions, in their jobs.

There are people in this church who have strong and clear callings to work in health care, or education, or law, or other fields, all in their own ways, trying to make the world a better place.

But sometimes we lose track of the calling due to frustrations and challenges. Sometimes the call changes as we journey through life.

Some people hear the call to purpose through tragic circumstances, which is the case for the father of pastor and author and comedian Rob Bell.

He tells a story about his father, who at the age of eight found out that his father had died when his uncle picked him up to take him to the funeral home. Rob Bell's father grew up without a father and made a commitment to be a good father. Bell writes about his childhood:

When I was growing up, my dad would come into my room every night before I went to bed and tell me that he loved me, and then he would stand in the doorway before he turned out the light and he would say, You're my pride and joy. He coached my soccer and basketball teams, he took us on vacations, he made my sister and brother and me pancakes on Saturday mornings, he helped us with our homework. When I left home to go to college, he sent me handwritten letters every week, never failing to remind me that he was cheering me on. (pp. 19-20)

Bell shares this anecdote in fascinating book on the topic of call and living a purposeful life called, *How to be HERE: A Guide to Creating A Life Worth Living*.

For what it's worth, the book is endorsed by a guy named Aaron Rodgers.

Rob Bell's father recognized his calling to be a good dad, to be kind, compassionate and present, as a result of his own tragic circumstances.

Some people find their calling in response to a specific situation where they realize they can make a difference.



Have any of you heard of Dan the Coffee Man? He has popped up on my newsfeed several times, so I finally checked out his story.

A long time ago when his dad was getting chemo, Dan saw a room full of people having a hard time, so he decided to go to the local coffee place and get all the patients a mocha, latte, frappuccino or whatever they wanted.

He's now done it for over ten years, giving out coffee for free along with conversation and encouragement, every week, to thousands of cancer patients.

Not everyone is called to bring coffee to cancer patients, but we're all called to something, to fish for people, to care for people, to make a difference in the people that God has placed in our lives.

Jesus said: The Kingdom is here. Repent, believe the good news. Follow me and fish for people. Find new purpose and meaning.

Our challenge is to hear the call. This is why we encourage one another over and over to read the Bible, to pray, to be involved in the life of the church, to honor the Sabbath.

When we do these things, we can really grow into our identity, our calling as God's people.

In 2017, we baptized ten people here at Covenant. Their names are on the prayer list, and most of them are pictured on the screen. Today on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we celebrate them, and we pray for them.

We made a promise to nurture, encourage, and support them in the Christian life.

As we remember and celebrate these ten newly baptized people and their families, it's a good day to remember that baptism is not a goal, but the beginning of a journey. It's the beginning of a lifetime of responding to the call of Jesus, to figure out who we are and why we are here. Amen.