

Summon us Lord Jesus, by the grace that first summoned the disciples. As you called us to be your children through the waters of Holy Baptism, call us now to the places you have for us: the Table, the Scriptures, our families, jobs, and neighbors. Help us to fish for all people with the net of your grace. Summon us Lord Jesus.

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Epiphany 3

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Mark 1:14-20

Summoned By Grace

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15**"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" **16**As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **17**"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." **18**At once they left their nets and followed him. **19**When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. **20**Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Have you ever been summoned to the Principal's Office? Have you ever received a phone call where a stranger asked for you by name? When this happens, your heart stops. You immediately try to recall what you did so that you can offer a good defense. The dog ate my homework. The witness is lying. It was an accident.

The other day, I received an email entitled, "Five things (excuses) to say if you are caught sleeping at work." 1) They told me at the blood bank that this might happen. 2) This is a 15 minute power nap that they taught me at the time management course you sent me. 3) I wasn't sleeping, I was just meditating on the company's mission statement. 4) I was doing a difficult yoga exercise. Do you discriminate against people who do yoga? 5) "... In Jesus Name, Amen!"

All of us make excuses. Humanity has done this from the beginning of time. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. All of us make excuses.

My favorite excuse given in the Bible comes from Aaron after Moses confronts him for making the golden calf. Aaron answers, "You know how prone these people are to evil... So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out jumped this calf!" (Exodus 32:21-24). Right!

Why do we do this? We know we are all sinners. We know that in some way we must be guilty.

What happens if the summons given is one of grace instead of punishment? What happens if the Principal wants to give you an award? What happens if the person on the phone is not a creditor but an agent from the Publishers Clearing House? At first, you might think a mistake has occurred. You might wonder what they are selling. However, when you finally discover that it is not a mistake or a sales pitch, suddenly everything is different. Reluctance turns to eagerness. Fear turns to confidence. Sorrow turns to joy. You call your friends together and throw a party. You have received a summons of grace.

Jesus' call to the disciples is a summons of grace. It is a summons because it has authority. Jesus is not simply a good teacher. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah. His words have power. It is grace

because Jesus came to preach good news. “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God” (Mark 1:14). Because his message is gospel, it should not surprise us that he would call unlikely people. Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John, “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (1:17, 20). Overwhelmed by grace, they “immediately” (euthus) leave their nets and their father in order to follow Jesus.

How are we to understand these words? The disciples are unlearned, salty, untrained in the Scriptures. What does it mean that these are the first followers? Even more, they leave their families and professions behind. What does this mean? Are we to take these words as an example? Should we raise our children without instruction in the faith so that God can call them as adults? No! Should we follow Jesus by abandoning our jobs and families? No! That is not the point.

Rather, these words are filled with the good news. Jesus is speaking to people who would have every excuse not to follow: “We have too much work.” “We are not educated.” “We have too many family obligations.” “We are too sinful.” Common sense would suggest that Jesus pass them by. Jesus does not. Instead, Jesus picks these lowly fishermen teaching us that employment, religion, education, family, or even morality cannot stop God’s call.

When I was called to be a pastor, I did not think I had the gifts to be a pastor. My dad was a carpenter. I did not like talking in front of people. I hated writing. However, God called, and nothing could stop it.

There is more. When Jesus calls, he does not fill them in on the details. The disciples did not know where they were going. They had no idea what Jesus has in store for them. They would witness teachings, healings, success, failure, forgiveness, the cross, resurrection, and many more experiences. They know none of these things. All they know is that Jesus is the one leading them.

How many of you are familiar with the name Joseph Gilmore? Joseph Gilmore was son of a Governor of New Hampshire. As a young man, he supply preached at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. At a midweek service, he began preaching on Psalm 23. When he got to the 3rd which says, “He leadeth me through paths of righteousness”, he stopped at the words, “He leadeth.”

Gilmore writes, “Those words took hold of me as they had never done before.” You see, it was the darkest hour of the Civil War. Many people wondered whose side was the right side. In the midst of such struggle, I realized that it makes no difference how I am led, or where I am led, so long as God is doing the leading.

After the sermon, Gilmore immediately wrote a poem of his thoughts. He gave them to his wife and thought no more about it. His wife loved the poem and sent it to a paper in Boston, where it was printed. Three years later, Gilmore was called by Rochester Baptist Church to preach as a candidate for the position of pastor. As the service began, he was surprised by a hymn the congregation was singing. He opened the hymnal and saw that it was his poem set to music. The title: “He Leadeth Me” (Morgan, Robert. Then Sings My Soul. Nashville: Nelson, 2003).

He leadeth me; oh blessed thought!
Oh, words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whatever I do, wherever I be,
Still tis God’s hand that leadeth me

What does this mean for us? All of us have been called by God. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God calls each of us as His own. He is not some principal summoning us to his office. He is our Lord and Savior. We of course have our doubts. We know our sin. We wonder if Jesus is making some mistake. "Lord, I really do not know enough." "Lord, I do not give enough time to you." "Lord, my family did not raise me in the faith." "Lord, I have problems in my life."

Remember, it is God who is doing the calling. Nothing can stop his call. The good news is that these things cannot stop Jesus' call. When Jesus calls, you are immediately his child. Jesus does not wait until you get it all together. Jesus does not wait until you clean yourself up. Jesus does not wait until you have it all figured out. Instead, he calls you and you are immediately his child. He speaks and it is so!

Even more, Jesus calls you to follow. Jesus calls you to the places that he has for you, namely, the Table, the Scriptures, your families, jobs, and neighbors. In all these places at all times whether good or bad, happy or sad, abundance or lean, Jesus leads you.

He leadeth me, he leadeth me,
By his own hand he leadeth me.
His faithful follower I would be,
For by his hand he leadeth me.

Now isn't that cause for celebration? Throw a party. Invite your family and friends. Who knows, they too may hear Jesus' gracious call and be caught in his net.

Let's go fishing!

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**