

## “We’re called by God to *Be*, before we’re called by God to *Do*.”

Our gospel reading begins with the news of John the Baptist’s arrest, which was apparently a signal that the ministry of Jesus was about to begin. Because we’re next told that Jesus moved his base of operations from his home-town of Nazareth to the fishing village of Capernaum, and that, from there, he began his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. And among the first things that Jesus needed to do was to begin assembling a team of disciples, which he does.

What has always struck me about this reading is how quickly Peter and Andrew, and James and John, just drop what they’re doing, turn their backs on their former lives, and hit the road with Jesus.

For that matter, it’s also striking how (again in Matthew’s gospel) how John the Baptist seems to appear out of nowhere, and quickly ramps up a popular and successful ministry of preaching and baptizing.

Now, when we hear how those disciples immediately dropped everything and followed Jesus — when we hear how John the Baptist just as quickly seems to bring his ministry up to full speed — we may be tempted to wonder if we could have responded in like-manner. And if you’re like me on most days, you may be harboring some doubts.

However, when we read about the process that *Jesus* follows in Matthew’s gospel — what Jesus does in that time between God’s call on him, and the actual start of his ministry — reflecting on that just might give us not only some direction, but also some hope. Because the first thing that Jesus did, after being called to do the work of God, was to retreat into the wilderness, and spend a significant amount of time in just *being* — being Jesus, the son of Mary; but especially just being Jesus, the son of God. And only then, only after spending time being, does Jesus set off to accomplish the work he’s been called to do.

Here’s the thing: I believe God’s call on each of us to *do* something, is always preceded by God’s call on us to *be* something. Certainly, we’re all called to be God’s kids, and to spend time reflecting on what that means. But individually,

we're also called by God to be some other thing, that will have a bearing on what God will later call on us to do.

In other words, God's call on us to do something, is always preceded by God's call on us to be something. And what's more, the time we spend being will give context and meaning to what we are later called to do.

For example, at the very beginning of my three year at seminary, the Dean made this announcement:

“Those whom God has called to *do* the work of priests, God has first called to *be* seminarians, who study very hard, and earn good grades, and finally graduate.”

And the time I spent being a seminarian proved invaluable in educating me, in forming me, and in enabling me to do the work of a priest.

Another example is when we learned that Peggy was pregnant with our first child. It really seemed like a gift from God, because we had tried to hard, and waited for so long. And so, for nine months we lived with the knowledge that we had been called to be parents. And we reflected upon what that meant, and how we might prepare. And so, when Dr. Williams delivered Laura into our arms, we felt better prepared for our calling to do the work of being a Mom and Dad.

So, I really believe that God always calls us to be something before he calls us to do something. And even though Matthew's gospel doesn't explicitly describe it, I do believe that we're supposed to assume that, prior to their calls to do the work of God, that Peter and Andrew, and James and John, and even John the Baptist, had already spent sufficient time reflecting on God's call on them to be something — again, and certainly, to be the children of God, but also to be something else that would relate to what they'd later be doing.

So, why is all this important? Well, several years ago a study was undertaken which revealed that most clergy believed they had been called by God to the work of a priest or pastor, and further, that the things they did day-in-and-day-out mattered to God, and mattered to the church, and made a difference in the world. No real surprise there.

However, that same study revealed that most lay people did not see the work they did day-in-and-day-out as a calling from God; nor did they believe that

what they did with most of their time mattered to God, or to the church, or made any real difference in the world.

In other words, what this study revealed is the fact that a lot of lay people cannot see any connection between what they're doing day-in-and-day-out and what they believe, which is why so many of them feel like they've never been called by God to do anything.

So, the first thing we all need to remember is that a calling from God isn't just to *do* something; it's also a call to *be* something.

And the second thing we need to keep in mind is the fact that whatever God calls us to be will prepare us for whatever it is that God may later call us to do.

And the final thing to remember is that, even if the only thing we believe we've been called to be, is to be a child of God, *that will be enough* to prepare us for whatever God may later call us to do. "My grace is sufficient," is an important passage to keep in mind.

And so, as you leave this morning, may you go knowing that you've been called to be a child of God. And even if *you* don't know exactly what that means, try to understand that, at the very least, it means that God values and honors and loves you.

And may you also know that, if you are open to being God's children, you will learn over time what it means and, indeed, find all kinds of things to do in response to God's call.

And we can tell them something else, too, that if they are open to being God's children, they will learn over time what it means and, indeed, find all kinds of things to do in response to God's call.

We live, I know, at a turbulent time in our country and world, where the needs run great. And so I understand if we want to get going and do something. But if we can first focus on being – just being – God's beloved children, and let that grace-filled identify seep into the deepest parts of ourselves, I have little doubt that those things we are called to do will become clear in time.

"Be still, and know that I am God."

Amen.

