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It's Not Just A Job...

(John 1:35-50 NRSV adapted¹) "The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). 42 He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). 43 The next day they decided to go to Galilee. Peter found Philip and led him to Jesus 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

Americans these days are a transient bunch of people. One study not long ago showed that 25% of all Americans moved from one place to another in the preceding year. I suspect that figure may even be higher in the Springs with our military population. But this trend of transience, which has been steadily increasing for the last

¹The adaptation in verse 43 follows the suggestion of Richard Donovan in "Sermonwriter" for Epiphany 2B, published 12/29/2005 <http://www.lectionary.org/downloads.htm> "The next day (he) decided (etheseles) to go to Galilee" (v. 43). *Who* decided? The NRSV has adopted one of the two likely interpretations by saying that it was Jesus, but the word 'Jesus' does not appear in the original Greek. It is quite possible that it was Andrew who decided to go to Galilee. In v. 42, Andrew found his brother, Peter, and led him to Jesus. It would make sense that Andrew then decided to go to Galilee (v. 43) where he found Philip and brought him to Jesus (v. 44)."

fifty years, is also partly *generational* in nature. For example, when I was a child and until I went to college, I lived in exactly two houses – but they were in the same town and were two miles apart. My father still lives in that same area. But **since** college – if you count apartments shared while in college or graduate school – *I* have lived in 18 different apartments or houses in eight different places in seven different states.

And that's not the only kind of transience that is increasingly a part of American life. Researchers predict that the average high school student today will have over a dozen jobs in his or her lifetime² and even, some have suggested, as many as nine different careers.³ Some of the skills that I learned in high school for possible future jobs would now be completely useless because those jobs just don't exist anymore. I got an "A" in high school typing class, but I would now be out of luck if I had set my sights on using a typewriter in my chosen career – just try finding a typewriter today, or, even worse, try finding someone who knows how to repair typewriters. Now, of course, the skill of typing carried over into using keyboards and computers, but some skills are just plain obsolete: I still have my father's slide rule, which I still used when I was in high school, but try finding anyone today under 40 who has ever seen a slide rule, much less knows how to use one! If I had decided in 1966 to become a repairman for eight-track tape players, my career path would have been short indeed.⁴

² <http://www.fcw.com/article88684-04-25-05-Web>

³ http://forbesgroup.com/resources/articles/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewArticle/article_id/122/?CFID=8641&CFTOKEN=39037839&

⁴ The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that, on average, younger baby boomers held ten jobs between the ages of 18 and 38. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf>

Now, while this kind of rapid cultural change, this kind of transience – in geography, in vocation, in so many other areas – may be an especially modern feature of life, the challenge to find a job, a career, a vocation that is satisfying is not limited to modern times. To spend your days in work that means something, that makes a difference, has long been one of humankind's deepest longings. And while many people in the course of history – and even now, in too many cases – have been born into situations where they had little choice about vocation, even these folks think about how to make their work more satisfying or lament that it isn't or imagine how much easier and more satisfying it would be to this job rather than that job. For example what, say, attorney or doctor or teacher hasn't had those days in which he or she imagined a job that was less stressful and – at least on that day – more satisfying. Even ministers on some days wonder if they should have been, oh, I don't know, vegetarian chefs. (This would have been a very poor career choice for me)

Our story from the gospel of John for this morning recounts an episode early in Jesus' ministry about how his first disciples were called. And what this story illustrates this morning, I believe, is two things: the difference on the one hand between a job or a career, and the meaning of the notion of calling and vocation for we who call ourselves Christians. I think it's an apt topic on a day in which we welcome a new minister to our midst, one who has answered the call of God that came to her – but which also comes to all of us in one form or another. So, for a few moments this morning, think with me on what it means for you and I as Christians to have the calling and the vocation that we do.

First, let's look at our story again. It starts not long after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Two of John's disciples leave John and begin to follow Jesus. One of them is Andrew, and Andrew goes and tells his brother Simon about Jesus and then they both return to Jesus. The next day Philip who also begins to follow Jesus. And, in turn, the story says that now Philip goes and finds Nathanael⁵ who also comes and begins to follow Jesus. And, you might be interested to know that this is the very same Philip whose last appearance in the Bible is in the Book of Acts where he continues this finding-thing by finding the Ethiopian Eunuch and bringing him to follow Jesus

Now what does this have to do with jobs and callings?⁶ Well, both Andrew and Peter were fishermen. That was their job. The Bible doesn't tell us what sort of job Philip had. It is also silent about Nathanael's pre-Jesus job. But we know, of course, that they must have had *some* sort of jobs. But the point of the scripture is this: now they also have a **calling**. Not just a job. Not just a career, but a **calling** as well. Now what is that? "*Calling*" is one of those "churchy" words, isn't it? And we mostly hear it used in talking about ministers, but, my friends, it is not just ministers who have callings. For two thousand years the church has called certain folks to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, has set apart through ordination certain folks to help lead congregations in their being the Body of Christ. And thanks be indeed that God has done so with Katherine Raley along with those ones who have served our congregation as ministers in the past and on whose shoulders we stand. But these ones, or Katherine, or I are not

⁵ Nathanael, of course, is not named as one of the apostles. Some scholars think, though, that this was an alternative name for Bartholomew. Cf. Donovan, "Sermonwriter," *ibid*.

⁶ For some of what follows re the distinction between jobs, careers, and callings I am indebted to Donovan, "Sermonwriter," *ibid*.

the only ones who have a calling; you don't get let off the hook. Because, you see, every single Christian and every single congregation, also has a calling. Your calling as a follower of Jesus Christ is to put whatever distinctive talents and abilities and gifts you have in the service of God in some fashion. It doesn't have to be in ordained ministry. It doesn't have to be dramatic or spectacular. But when in **some** way, in **some** part of your life, your talents and abilities and gifts are put into the service of God's purposes for creation, then there's your calling. For some folks, their calling whereby they serve God in this way is through the work that they do day to day. Whether they're software engineers or insurance agents or teachers or whatever, these folks express God's call to them by living out the Golden Rule in their jobs, by treating people better than they sometimes deserve, by trying to be manifestations of grace. For other folks, their deepest God-given calling is something different from the job they do for pay. For some it is a calling to visit the sick. For some it is a calling to visit the homeless in Acacia Park or to bring food to those who are hungry or to visit those who are imprisoned. And whatever your calling in this sense, whether it is expressed in the job that you have or in some other way, doesn't that calling give you a deep sense of joy and peace? The great Christian novelist Frederick Buechner put the point poetically in this way: *"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."*⁷ *"The place... where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."* Isn't that just lovely and perfect? You have a calling. It is not the same as your friend's calling or your spouse's calling or your parents' callings or your children's callings. It is

7 Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 95. Quoted in Donovan, "Sermonwriter" Ibid.

the place where you use your distinctive gifts, talents, and abilities in a way that indeed helps assuage some small part, some small corner, of the world's need and it gladdens your soul. That is your calling.

Now, if that's the calling that you or I as individuals have, what is the calling that a congregation has? What is the calling that our congregation has? Well, our scripture has a pattern in it that will show us the answer, for notice again how the story goes : It starts out with John the Baptist pointing out Jesus to Andrew. And Andrew goes and finds his brother Simon Peter and tells him about Jesus. And Peter finds Philip and tells him about Jesus. And Philip finds Nathanael and tells him about Jesus, and at the last of Philip's appearances in the Book of Acts, he finds the Ethiopian eunuch, an outcast, an outsider, and tells him about Jesus. Do you now see the pattern? "Find, go, and tell." **Find, go, and tell.** That's it. That's the calling for every Christian congregation.

Because just as with Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, just as with Andrew's word to his brother Simon that caused him to drop his fishing nets and find his deep gladness, so too are we as members of First Christian Church are called to "**find, go and tell.**" Because while there are not any Ethiopian eunuchs that I am aware of in El Paso County, there ARE plenty of folks who do not know that sense of calling, of deep gladness, of the promise and purpose God has for their lives; those who are oppressed by hurts and problems and worries and demons. There are those who have been abused and abraded, sadly, even by other churches. There are those who are weighed down by notions of God that tell them that God is an inscrutable tyrant just lying in wait

to punish them. There are those who think that God has played a trick on them by making them the way they are, constituting them to love in certain ways, and then punishing them if they honorably act on that. There are those, as Thoreau put it, who are living lives of quiet desperation.

My friends, do you know some of those people? They come to our doors Sunday by Sunday. They come sometimes scared or shy. They come wanting desperately to find a church that is not banal, bigoted, or boring. They come wondering if the clothes they wear or the tattoos they sport or the piercings they have disqualify them for being welcomed. They come with some deep and hungry yearning that they may not even know how to name for a connection to something beyond themselves, some relationship to God that is not hurtful or hateful, some experience of the deep gladness that they have yet to find. They come seeking a purpose for their lives that is bigger than themselves.

And thanks be to God that they have found us. And thanks be to God that we shall indeed welcome these ones and show them what a God of gentleness and grace and joy looks like. But there are so many others who have not yet found us. And our job, our opportunity, our calling is just as our scripture story this morning says: **Find, go, and tell.** So, here's the deal: You are here this morning because indeed you have found! You **have found** a God of grace and a community of care. And you **will** leave this morning to *go* into this world where there are so many hurting and yearning people. And the question on your lips as you depart, as you go, should be this: Who can I tell? Who can I tell? Who can I tell?