

# Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

January 14, 2024

---

## Sacrificial Calling

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Details matter, and they especially matter in a work like the Gospel of Mark. In such a short, and direct piece of writing, it would serve us well to pay close attention to what the author is telling us. We can never capture the author's intent fully, his "horizon of meaning" as Gadamer would call it. But when we try to drill down and consider all of what the author is telling us, and try to keep track of the little details, we will come much closer to the original intent.

So, did you catch any minor details in our Gospel reading this morning? And if so, why do you think they were included? Well, let's take a look at these details:

First off, the author tells us that this scene is occurring after the arrest of John the Baptist. The author is foreshadowing conflict for us. Conflict between those sent by God and those in power. This theme will play out numerous more times in this Gospel. Next, we learn that this is taking place in Nazareth. Which means we've shifted locations. Up until now we've been with John in the region around Jerusalem, the center of religious and political life for the Israelites. Now we find ourselves in Galilee, while a center for fishing and farming, it was not a particularly important or influential region.

I'm going to skip over verse 15, as in many ways it is one of the main thesis statements of this Gospel and is NOT a minor detail! On then to the calling of these two sets of brothers. First Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, and the detail I want to point out here is actually found a few verses later regarding Simon and Andrew: verses 29 and 30 of Mark 1, "As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once." Why are these details important to the call story we are studying this morning? It gives us insight into Simon and Andrew. They have

a house and are a part of an established family. Simon is married, hence the presence of his mother-in-law who is sick.

Now on to James and John. The detail in their call story I want to draw your attention to is found in verse 20, “Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.” Once again, we know that they were part of an established fishing family from the reference to Zebedee; but we can also conclude that this family was better off than the average fisher family as they are able to afford hired hands to fish with them.

The last detail I want to lift up is how the author describes these first disciples’ response. In both call stories those called **immediately** leave in order to follow Jesus. This stands in quite the juxtaposition to our Hebrew Bible reading today! Jonah did everything possible to avoid his call, immediately running the opposite direction from where God told him to go.

But that immediately is made even more powerful when we consider the details we’ve been focusing on. These two sets of brothers have well established lives already. They have families and vocations. And in the case of James and John, they seem to have come from some wealth too. Yet all four of these men immediately drop what they’re doing, leave their well-established lives, and begin to follow an itinerant Rabbi that (for all we know) they just met.

When we consider the details of Mark’s Gospel we begin to see what following Jesus cost Simon and Andrew, and James and John. It cost them comfort and stability. It cost them their livelihoods and possibly their family connections. It was no small sacrifice! This is not new with God either. We can find numerous other instances in Scripture where God calling someone means they have to make sacrifices. Jonah certainly had to give something near and dear up!

Indeed, Jonah had to make a sacrifice when God called him too. And he was so against making this sacrifice that he did everything possible to avoid God’s call...to an absurd degree. The book of Jonah is meant to be something of a comedy as it is filled with hyperbole. And all of that exaggeration, all of that embellishment serves one purpose...to emphasize how desperate Jonah was to avoid God’s call, and the accompanying sacrifice.

What was Jonah ultimately asked to sacrifice in order to heed God's call? His prejudice! His ideology! His political views! Jonah was deeply prejudiced against the people of Nineveh (and frankly, given their contentious history, this should come as no great surprise). He admits that he didn't want to warn the people of Nineveh about God's wrath because he knew God would be merciful! Jonah fought God's call because he knew it would lead to life for Nineveh and he didn't want that for them!

God calls people for the sake of people. God calls people for the sake of building community and strengthening connections. God calls people to make sacrifices for the sake of others. And when we understand that, its no wonder so many of us fight the call. We prefer the comfort of the status quo, especially those of us who are white, straight, and cis-gendered. We prefer the option to look down on others. We enjoy feeling superior to those our society has crushed and pushed to the margins. God's call is to change all that. God's call is for us to "fish for people."

We're not called to build the membership of the church. We're not called save souls and win people for the kingdom. We are called to love and serve others. We are called to a holy curiosity about others. The sort of curiosity that helps us treat others the way they wish to be treated. We are called to cast wide the nets of God's love and grace and embrace all who are caught up in them.

And there is a cost to this holy calling, this holy work. It may be a sacrifice of comfort, going without so others can have. It may be the sacrifice of a relationship, calling someone out when they tell that racist or homophobic joke. It may be a sacrifice of ideology, seeing how our beloved systems may actually be causing harm. It may be a sacrifice of power, inviting a marginalized outsider into a place where you have influence.

God is calling you. God is always calling you...calling us. I pray we hear the call and heed it. I pray that we support one another when we struggle with the call. And I pray that we're willing to make the sacrifices that God's call can require. Amen.