

God who calls us, help us to hear your word, and respond as best as we are able. Amen.

If you were here last Sunday, perhaps you remember that I ended my sermon with a question.

It wasn't meant to be rhetorical.

After exploring what it means to be called by God, I said:

Being a disciple – being a prophet – it's not always easy work.

But it's good work. It's valuable work.

And it's the work to which God calls us.

So how will you answer?

Last week we explored the topic of call.

This week, we explore the topic of discipleship.

Call and discipleship.

The two are related but not identical. A *call* is how God reaches out to us and tries to give us some purpose in life.

Discipleship is the way we respond to that call – both initially and over time.

The Bible gives us many examples of what discipleship can look like.

Last week, we met Nathanael. Nathanael was reluctant. He was skeptical. He wasn't so sure about this Jesus guy. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Nathanael was not about to take Philip's word for it. He needed to see Jesus for himself.

Or not. I mean, he didn't really care about even meeting the guy at first.

But then he does meet Jesus.

And Jesus totally impresses him.

Nathanael becomes a believer in Jesus for two reasons: first, because Philip invited him, and he trusted Philip.

But for Nathanael the skeptic, even the referral of a friend wasn't quite enough.

He needed to see for himself (the second reason).

And then he did, and he believed, and the story of his discipleship is remembered even now, two thousand years later.

Nathanael offers one example of discipleship.

Simon and Andrew, James and John, offer a totally different model.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus was out for a walk when he saw these fishermen.

And Jesus says, follow me!

And immediately, Simon and Andrew dropped everything – including, presumably, the catch of the day – in order to follow Jesus.

Then Jesus saw James and John, and also invited them to follow!

And immediately, they dropped their nets, abandoned their father, and followed him.

There are some loose ends to this story.

Had these guys ever met before?

Were these fishermen giving up their livelihoods for a cause they already believed in, or did Jesus give such a great first impression that they felt compelled to give up everything to follow him?

Either way, their model of discipleship is immediate, and comprehensive.

Simon and Andrew left behind the tools of their profession.

James and John left behind their colleagues.

These disciples don't leave themselves a safety net. They put all their eggs into the basket of whatever it will mean to follow Jesus.

Of course, there are other ways to respond to God's call.

Today we also heard about Jonah.

His initial call isn't included in the passage we heard this morning... but we know the story. God gave Jonah a message to deliver to the people of Nineveh.

And Jonah promptly ran in the opposite direction.

Jonah tried to escape from God by boarding a boat and sailing far away – but God sent a storm to stop the ship, and Jonah realized that his shipmates could only live if they got rid of him in order to appease the anger of God.

So they threw Jonah overboard, at his request, and their lives were saved.

Then, God saved Jonah's life also, by having a large fish swallow him whole.

I don't know about you, but I can think of about a hundred other ways in which I would prefer to be kept safe.

Apparently the whale agreed with me, because Jonah didn't agree with it, and after a few days, Jonah came back up the way he went down.

That's where today's story comes in.

God reiterates the command to Jonah, and Jonah decides that this time, he will follow God's call.

And then something happens that is unheard of among prophets. Jonah's mission is successful! He only does a halfhearted job delivering his message, but it's more effective than he could ever have imagined!

And Jonah got grumpy about it. If you keep reading the story about Jonah, after today's lesson, you'll find that he's angry with God for allowing the Ninevites to repent, and for not destroying them completely.

This prophet achieved exactly the result he was asked to complete, and he was upset.

Jonah was the unwilling disciple who could never be pleased. His response to God's call is probably not the best model for us to follow. But it is a legitimate response nonetheless... and one that many of us can probably find relatable.

So we have the skepticism of Nathanael.

The all-in discipleship of Simon and Andrew, James and John.

And the grudging ministry of Jonah.

Last week's texts gave us another example of how to respond to God's call.

The child, Samuel, didn't recognize God's voice at first.

He had to be told by a mentor that the voice that was calling his name was actually God's and that God must have a particular call for him.

Only then did Samuel settle down and listen for God's voice. And only after Samuel had heard God's voice clearly was he able to respond.

I'm reminded of a conversation I had with a college classmate, many years ago. He had just changed his major – in the middle of his senior year – because he knew he was never going to be a music educator – he was going to be a pastor.

I told this friend that many people had also told me that they thought I should be a pastor... but I just wasn't sure.

I hadn't heard God calling me to that, specifically.

My friend reminded me that a call from God often comes to us through the voices of other people.

Like Samuel, I wasn't really sure that God was calling me. But I responded anyway, in faith that God would be there to direct me, if only I would take the first step.

Discipleship shows up in so many forms, and not only in the Scriptures.

Members of Lake Edge are also invited into discipleship. Each year, more than 60 of you serve in elected positions on missions or committees.

The bravest of you even agree to serve a term on church council!

If this is you – thank you! Your response to this call makes our shared ministry possible.

Yesterday, many of our elected leaders gathered for the annual leadership retreat. The goal of this retreat is to explore ways we can use our individual passions within the structure of team ministry to deepen our commitment to our congregation's mission: *Daring to Embody the Gospel*.

In essence, we spend this time each year trying to learn to be better disciples of Jesus, and finding ways to bring the whole congregation along on that mission.

Yesterday we talked about leadership in times of change. From a new church building to new worship styles, from affirming LGBTQ+ folks to having intentional conversations about race, from new pastoral leadership to a different demographic makeup of this congregation – Lake Edge Lutheran Church has seen many changes over the years.

And most of us have embraced every single one.

And we know that even more changes are on our horizon.

Part of being church together is recognizing that the Spirit continues to move among us, and guide us to new ways of showing God's love to the world.

It's not always easy. Honestly, it's not always fun.

But it is always rewarding. And it is the right thing to do.

We have this in common with Nathanael, with Samuel and Jonah, with Simon and Andrew, James and John: we have decided to respond to God's call.

As a community, we look to one another and to God for guidance about how best to respond to that call.

We may be skeptical. Our first impulse may be to run the other way.

Or we may respond immediately, without hesitation, jumping in with both feet and unafraid of what is to come!

Whatever our response, we can be confident in this: God calls us.

God has a purpose for us.

God wants us to follow, as all those people in Scripture followed the call, however reluctantly or enthusiastically.

*Being a disciple – being a prophet – it's not always easy work.
But it's good work. It's valuable work.
And it's the work to which God calls us.
And we answer.*

Please pray with me.

Gracious God, teach us to follow your call. Help us share your Word with others, and remind us continually of what your love means for us. Guide us as we seek to be your disciples.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.