

Summoned

Text Matthew 4:12-23

Preached FCCW 1-22-2017

In two weeks, Super Bowl 51 will be played in Houston, showcasing once again, two of the elite teams of the National Football League. (Hopefully, one of them will be the Patriots.)

It will also serve once again, as a stage for the unveiling of the crème de la crème of television advertising.

Like the game itself, sometimes the vaunted Super Bowl ads live up to the hype surrounding them, and other times they disappoint. But the best of them stand the test of time.

Like one created by the job search website, Monster.com. I posted it on the church Facebook page this week, so maybe you saw it.

If not, let me try to help you picture it. The ad begins with residents of an ordinary suburban neighborhood waking up in their homes surrounded by pre-dawn darkness and streaming out of their houses, into the streets.

They are dressed in pajamas and bathrobes and as they go along they grab and take with them all sorts of random ordinary objects, among them mattresses, trash can lids and satellite-dishes.

Their paths converge on a hilltop where the glimmer of dawn is growing brighter on the horizon. On the hilltop they take a stand, shoulder to shoulder, with their objects held in front of them like shields. They form a kind of human barricade, determined to hold back the advancing intrusion of daylight.

But it is a losing battle.

As the sun rises, the light of day washes over them and their community like a great tidal wave.

One by one they drop their makeshift defenses and return dejectedly to their homes.

The caption on the screen reads: Don't Fight

Monday.

Then those words fade to black and are replaced with the slogan: Your Calling is Calling.

It's a clever way of implying that monster.com can replace the 9 to 5 job you have with something better.

Now, when people avail themselves of the services offered bymonster.com it is because they are seeking employment.

Maybe they are looking for something more attractive than the job they already have; a job that pays better, or provides superior benefits, or promises more personal fulfillment.

Some of them might be out of work entirely and are desperately searching for any employment that will allow them to feed their family or stay out of foreclosure.

They may define their objective as a job, an occupation, or a profession. I doubt that many of them would use the word “calling” to describe what they are looking for. It’s a very narrow bandwidth of the population that think in terms of a “calling” to a certain vocation. Most of those who use that word, are women and men who enter some form of ministry. Those other words, like job and career, carry the sense of something we do to provide for our own needs. To keep a roof over our heads and food on the table and the resources to realize our own hopes and dreams.

A “calling” stands apart because it means service to others. There is less a sense of acquiring and more of a sense of sacrifice and surrender associated with calling.

Which explains why we speak of job-hunting and career-searching, expressions that summon images of actively pursuing something we desire; as opposed to “calling” which emphasizes not something we are purposely looking for, but something that seeks and finds us and invites us to respond.

The Gospel reading for today is all about livelihoods and a “callings.” The story unfolds in the region of Galilee, where Jesus is calling his first disciples. Galilee was an unlikely place for Jesus to go looking for people to be his disciples. Galilee was a backwater area of Israel and Galileans tended to be hard-working but not necessarily sophisticated folks, who were looked down on by their fellow Jews. Yet, it was about Galilee that that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he predicted:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.”

That light spread across the beaches of the Sea of Galilee one morning, when Jesus walked its sands and called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John to accept their calling as his disciples.

Notice that they are not job hunting when Jesus finds them. They aren’t touching up their resumes. They are hard at work doing what fishermen do; mending and cleaning their nets after a hard nights work.

It is not they who have gone looking for Jesus. It is Jesus who has gone out of his way -- from Nazareth to Galilee -- to seek them.

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” is what Jesus said to those Galilean fishermen.

It's worth noting that Jesus did not say, “Come with me and be my disciples.”

He didn’t say, “Follow me and help me change the world.”

He didn’t present them with an opportunity to get in on the ground level of this new start-up called “the Church.”

If he had said something like that, they might have never hopped out of their boats to follow him. It wouldn't have sounded like the kind of work they were cut out for. They might have resisted their calling the way the people in that monster.com ad did. Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Scottish novelist John Buchanan once wrote that: "The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope."

When Jesus called to Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, "Follow me" that was an elusive and open-ended invitation. But when he put it in terms of fishing, it sounded familiar and attainable enough to give them the courage to take him up on his invitation.

Because he didn't say, "Follow me, and you will fish for people."

He said, Follow me, and I WILL MAKE YOU fish for people."

Even before they fully comprehended what he was calling them to do, or if they were up to the task, there dawned within them a faith that he would somehow equip and empower them for whatever lay ahead. That whatever it took for them to succeed in what he needed them to do, he would provide.

In other words, Jesus met them where they were at. Not only in the literal sense of where they were in their boats on that Galilean beach. He also met them where they were at in terms of their ability and readiness to believe in their being qualified for whatever he was calling them to become.

And that is how Jesus is calling you.

And he is calling you.

You wouldn't be here this morning, otherwise.

Responding to your calling doesn't demand your leaving everything behind. It can mean being open to what Jesus can do with the life you already have.

It can mean ministering in Jesus' name through what you already do.

Whether we are fishermen or physicians, landscapers or lawyers, ministers or mothers, Jesus meets us wherever we are and promises that if you have faith enough he will make you into someone who serves him where you are and with what you already have.

Jesus is calling all of us to be his followers. We don't have to drop everything and go off to some mountaintop to find him. He has already come looking for us right where we are.

All we have to do is to let the light of his love into the lives we are already living.

Doing that converts our everyday labors into a "perpetual series of occasions for hope." Hope not only for us, but for those whose lives intersect with ours.

But we can resist our calling, like those people in the ad who tried to keep the light from dawning upon them. He gives us that option.

Henry David Thoreau once said, "Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

I think he meant that we can spend our lives in a vain pursuit of purpose and fulfillment through things that fail to satisfy those needs.

And when we cling to such things hoping they will deliver us, we are like the people in the ad, using whatever is at our disposal to shield us against the very light that alone can save us.

But those who accept Jesus' summons to follow him are at last able to drop their shields to receive what

they were truly after.

If there was a monster.com ad for discipleship, instead of saying, "Don't fight Monday" it would say, "Don't fight Sunday." It would still show the crowd bracing themselves against the light. But in their hands would be everyday objects that we allow to come between us and our calling to follow Jesus, including our selection doubts, fears and failures of imagination.

Like the TV ad says, "Your Calling is Calling."

How are you responding?