

Matthew 4: 18-24

Friday night was the first class of our writing your faith course. It was so much fun!

Jerome, who is a great teacher, had us jump right in and write something about our earliest experiences of faith – and some of us shared what we'd written. I hadn't really thought beforehand what that was going to be like, but it was powerful. Different styles, all first drafts of course (he only GAVE us 15 min!) but the emotions in the writing were honest and real and....well....I can't wait for next week.

First experiences of faith.

Was this – Simon and Andrew, James and John's first experience of Jesus, do you think? We don't know. It simply does not say. I had always sort of assumed it was: there they are, mending their nets and along comes Jesus and says Follow me – and they do.

Matthew's narrative gives no hint – had all these men, including Jesus – perhaps grown up together in that area, in which case they weren't dropping everything to follow a complete stranger but rathera friend with whom they had often talked, as young boys do, about the world and how to make it right?

Was it like that?

Or...as younger men....had Jesus' carpenter shop been the place to go for oars or wooden fish crates....and maybe they would stop by after fishing to rest and talk and dream

They were all Jews so this is NOT their first encounter with the Holy. Had they all gone to synagogue together? If they were similar ages, had they gone to school together?

Or....had Jesus gone there as a stranger, but frequented the shore, hanging around, talking with them all for weeks, or months, so that when the call came, - he knew who he was calling and they had some idea of who they left everything to follow?

Come with me, he said. And I will make you fish for people. It was enough. They followed.

What was said to YOU – that led you to be his follower?

What happened – and was it a one-time thing?

Or more like a collection, a layer cake of experiences one upon another, frosted together with the stuff of your life until finally, the final – the final touch on top, and you said YES

Maybe you were nurtured into faith, so that even though it's changed over the years, there has never been a time when you did not know God? Maybe that's how it's been for you.

Or maybe you're still deciding?

All of that is ok – there are lots of ways, lots of calls and LOTS of ways to respond to that call

Don't ever let anyone, including me – tell you what your experience of God should be.

One thing that the Friday night class did for me was to bring it home more clearly than ever before that we are ALWAYS experiencing the Holy – because God is everywhere, embedded and incarnate. Sometimes we recognize that- mostly we don't

And so a call like this is never a one- time thing, a bolt out of the blue. The blue has been calling all along.

By now you've probably heard me tell my own faith story. The short version of it goes like this:

My family was not churched at all...not even at Christmas did we go to church. I went to SS sporadically as a kid with my friends, mostly for the end of year parties...

At 14, the church was offering confirmation classes. My best friend Linda's mom was making her go. She said "If I have to go to this thing then you have to come with me" and I did. At 14 I thought church was kind of dumb...and I was going to be a scientist. I was angry in the way a teenager is angry, at the unfairness I saw in the world.

They said the confirmation classes started in Jan and that confirmation was in June and if in June we didn't want to be confirmed that was fine. I thought "this is the class for me – I'll play your silly game".

By June, there was nothing more I wanted than to be confirmed as a follower of Jesus. In that class, Jesus was presented to me as the One who was angry with me, at the world's unfairness; that God had made the world to be a peaceful and happy place and that Jesus went to the wall for saying so, and gave himself - his whole self – to bring it back to God. And that he was still doing it – death couldn't stop him. Did I want to help?

Yes, I thought. Yes. I want to do that. I want to follow him. Yes that is something I can give my life to.

Many years and lots of theological education later, when push comes to shove, that's still how I see it. I want to follow Jesus in ways of justice and peace.

BUT – this week's insight – but that didn't come out of the blue. That was not my first encounter with God....Friday night I wrote about being 5, and a box of crayons that helped me sense God as holy and mysterious and so much more than I had thought.

And on the way home from that class I remembered something even earlier than that. I think this was one of the first in the call and response song that God and I have been singing ever since.

I always say our family was not churched, and that's true, but.....mom liked it when I went to SS, I know that, and when I was 3 our next door neighbour was Mrs. Turner and she was the pianist for the SS and so she took me with her. I was in the youngest class, and we met in the choir room, ...there was a piano there and I loved the music. Mrs. Czinkota was our teacher. She wore bright red lipstick and she could sing. OH MY she could sing. Once, I wore a dress that had a pattern of strawberries on it and she said "that's a pretty dress. Those strawberries look good enough to eat"

Isn't it interesting what sticks in the memory of a child? That moment is as clear to me now as then – you never know what throw away comment will be a blessing, and form part of a holy call

Anyway, we learned a song. This is what I heard.

“Jesus wants me for a sunbean to shine for him each day

In every way try to please him at home, at school, at play”

I didn't know what a sunbean was. At home, we ate sunflower seeds. And so I thought that's what it might be...the sunflower seeds sort of look like beans. I didn't know why Jesus would want me for one of those, butyou know....I didn't really care. What I heard, in that song, was the message. Jesus WANTS me. And it felt good. And if he wanted me to be a sunbean...well that was ok with me. I wanted to be part of that song, that place, that feeling....the feeling that somehow, somewhere and someone, loved me and wanted me. It felt good. And so I sang

“A sunbean a sunbean, Jesus wants me for a sunbean

A sunbean, a sunbean – I'll be a sunbean for him.”

I was singing it in the car on the way home and Mrs Turner laughed and said it was a sunbeam, but I liked my words better. I still do.

Do you remember in the Life of Brian a scene where Jesus is teaching but we're with the crowd in the distance and we can't really hear, - someone says “What did he say?” “Blessed are the cheese makers?” the other guy says “It's a reference to all dairy products” – a silly scene but it illustrates something deeper – sometimes we don't hear right – but the call comes anyway. Something calls us into mystery and holiness. Something about Jesus just keeps calling.

I wonder if Simon ,Andrew, James and John had a similar experience – even if they heard Jesus correctly, did they have any idea what it meant? But they followed.

And as they did find out – adding more and more layers

More verses to the antiphonal song of call and response, call and response

Did they wonder – if I had known then what I know now...would I have followed?

Can you name those moments in our life when something brought to you the call of God – when Jesus said “Follow me”

It might sound just like that.

It might, however sound like “what a pretty dress; those strawberries look good enough to eat”

Or Jesus wants me for a sunbean

It might sound like a newscast that brings home to you the need of the world that you have to reach out to

It might sound like a question you can't answer, or a phone call that says "hi – I'm calling from the nominating committee" Or it might sound like silence.

Dag Hammarskjöld said *"I don't know who – or what- put the question. I don't know when it was put, I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that life in self-surrender, had a goal"*

Jesus is always calling. The call comes in many forms. Sometimes in worship settings.....often not. Here, for these fishers, it's right in the middle of work. Watch in scripture how that happens....mostly people encounter God, get to see Jesus, in the places they live and work. It's not always a bolt of lightning and God forgive us the church hasn't always said that loudly enough. We've made people feel inadequate if they can't tell a faith story that includes the spiritual equivalent of bells and whistles.

For most of us, or at least for many, it's a series of small moments – a song with many verses

And with more to come

May you listen well and respond with your whole being

Amen