

Call Stories (4July21)
Mark 6:1-13; Ezekiel2:1-5

The Bible readings today have call stories. Or, because you can't have one without the other, calling and sending stories. God calls Ezekiel and sends him to say "Thus says the LORD God." We'll hear Jesus call his disciples and send them out two-by-two to heal and teach.

So it seemed kinda fun today to hear some more call stories. And you'll get to!

First, a bit more intro. I'm not sure we'd feel like we've had the experiences of the Bible passages, having heard a voice with heavenly visions, or been directly commissioned by Jesus himself.

On the other hand, I don't want to diminish that you hear God's voice call to you in worship, and from here Jesus sends you out to extend his mission.

Yet it may feel foreign to say you have a calling. In contrast, when I was in seminary, it was constant. Almost daily at times. We didn't have elevator speeches; we had call stories, telling of how God got us to seminary on the path to being a pastor.

500 years ago, Martin Luther struggled against this reduced perspective, that church professionals had holy callings, but other people had mundane, secular jobs. He refuted those who said it was holier and better to be a pastor than to be a parent changing diapers or a shoemaker or even a soldier, all of which could serve God's activity in the world. Our views tend to get this exactly backward, thinking some callings are holier and put us closer to God. The good Lutheran phrase is: God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does. God calls you to send you. It's how God's work reaches into our world. It led Luther even to say that God is milking the cows through the vocation of the farmer.*

So I celebrate God's work in all the callings of your life—jobs, volunteering, family, friends, being a citizen, living on this planet, etc. etc. I suspect I say too little for you about that big

perspective, "in every circumstance of life, "as it said in our Prayer of the Day.

Which is prelude to say we're going to share call stories, and I'd love to hear yours. Intern Lisa and I will share them in the seminary and pastor mode. But I really, really, really don't want you to hear those as the only kind of calling from God, nor as a better kind. She and I may be more used to this language, but that's no advantage for how much God works through us.

Hoping that's firmly enough stated, here's my spiel:

Growing up, when I'd have a role in church, people would occasionally ask if I'd ever thought about being a pastor. Remember, God speaks in these voices, so it's worth sharing those questions, especially with young people, and it's worth listening. Not just about in church, but wherever in God's world.

Still, my answer was Nope. I was sure I was going into forestry to work for the DNR. Positive. But my grandpa kept telling me he wanted to talk with me. Finally, in the spring of my senior year, I sat down with him one afternoon. He didn't push. What I remember of the conversation is summed up in two words: being there. He wanted to describe for me, that for him, being a pastor meant being there with people's lives.

I still have the feeling of walking down the steps from his front door that day and somehow knowing that I wasn't following the path to forestry and would do this instead. It was right for me.

Of course, that doesn't clarify everything. Ezekiel seems to have no idea what his message from God will be, and it sounds scary being sent by Jesus unprepared to face strangers. I prepared by majoring in German, partly knowing my grandpa used to preach sometimes in German. Well, that isn't how it's turned out for me. My first day of internship, I walked into my office not sure at all what a pastor did during the week. I still don't have it figured out. And that's one of my favorite things.

This week, Kris Knoepke's dad Elmer asked if I like doing this. I said yes, because you're fabulous and I love you. And he asked if this year was hard,

* Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, p9

and I said yes, because this is about being with you, which I don't always get right. But this year I mostly wasn't with you, with one-way worship broadcasts, cut off from many hospital visits, an empty building. So much less contact, less fun, less life.

Nevertheless, I hope and trust God was still working, still sending me to the world God loves, especially to you. But I don't know. We can't prove it. These things likely don't feel holier, and maybe should, in fact, feel like normal life and "every circumstance" in the world, where God is already out there milking cows and teaching and healing, and sometimes it's with our hands and voices and hearts.