

- 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.
- 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”
- 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.
- 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.
- 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

This morning’s reading contains two brief call accounts. Now, ordinarily, Mark’s writing is short and to the point. Things happen quickly in Mark’s gospel, he does not use a lot of description – of the four gospel writers, Mark could be described as the bible’s Joe Friday – just the facts ma’am.

With this information one would think that Mark would have written something like:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw four fishermen: Simon and his brother Andrew, John and his brother James, and he said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

But today we read two separate call accounts. Mark describes the calling of Simon and Andrew and then he writes about James and John’s calling.

When we think about that for a moment and knowing what we know and what we read of the calls, some questions come to mind:

- Why does Mark write about two separate callings?
- Why does Jesus call these particular foursome?
- What leads them to respond to Jesus in this way?
- What is missing from Mark’s description?
- Why do they “immediately” leave their business and follow Jesus?

Nothing in the text provides an answer to these questions – but two illustrations may help explain the feelings that Simon, Andrew, James and John had when Jesus called them.

This first illustration concerns William Willimon and his invitation to speak to a Duke University fraternity one night:

To maintain some semblance of respectability the college dean required each fraternity to have a certain number of programs each year. When William receive his assigned topic he couldn't wait; he couldn't believe that they were dumb enough to invite an old guy like him to talk to the frat boys on the topic – "Character and College."

When he arrived at the fraternity door, he knocked. The door was opened and a young lad of about nine or ten greeted him. William asked himself, "What is a kid doing over here at this time of the night? Surely there are rules about young children being in a fraternity's dorm at this time of day.

"They're waiting for you in the common room," the boy said. "Follow me, I'll take you there."

The fraternity was gathered in the common room, they were glumly waiting for his presentation. As he began the little boy climbed onto the lap of one of the brothers. Shortly, he fell asleep with his head on the shoulder of this college kid.

William hammered those fraternity brothers about the moral failures of their generation for about half an hour. When he finally finished he asked if they had any questions or comments. There was dead silence, not one question from anyone. So, he thanked them for the honour, and began to pack up to leave. He over heard the college kid say to the little boy, "You go on and get ready for bed. I'll be in to tuck you in and read you a story."

By the time William had packed up the fraternity boy was on the front porch having a smoke. His curiosity go the best of him and he asked, "Who was the kid there tonight?"

"Oh, that's Darrell," he said. "The fraternity is part of the Durham Big Brother program. We met Darrell that way. His mom's on crack and having a tough time. Sometimes it gets so bad that she can't care for him. So we told Darrell to call us up when he needs us. We go over, pick him up, and he stays with us until it's okay to go home. We take him to school, buy him his clothes, books, and stuff."

William had a change of heart when he heard this and said, "I take back all that I said about you people being bad and irresponsible."

"I tell you what's amazing," the fraternity boy said as he took another drag on his cigarette, "what's amazing is that God would pick a guy like me to do something this good for somebody else."

Another example:

In 1994 nearly a million people in Rwanda were murdered, many hacked to death by machete. Most were of the Tutsi tribe, murdered by those of the Hutu tribe. The movie *Hotel Rwanda* chronicles this massacre from the perspective of one man, Paul Rusesabagina, the manager of a five-star hotel right in the middle of the bloodshed. Paul was a Hutu, the tribe who had taken control of the government. Paul's job and his identity as a Hutu gave him access to important people, some of the most powerful Hutus in the country. Paul's wife was a Tutsi, the people formerly favoured by colonial rulers and hated by the Hutu. Paul was a man who had built bridges over, around, and right through the middle of the hatred that was consuming his country.

In 1994, when the killing began, the whole world watched and did nothing. United Nations peacekeepers on the ground in Rwanda were prevented from intervening and eventually left with the white tourists and foreigners. Paul and his people were left alone by the conventional wisdom that said intervention in another nation's problems – at least this problem in this nation – was not wise. Over the course of several days, Paul used the bridges he had built with the Hutus to protect his family and staff in the hotel. Soon more people came seeking protection; then still more. The hotel became a safe place for Tutsis trying to escape the murder all around them, as Paul evaded one threat after another, the bridges he had built got shakier and shakier.

Finally, a chance came to get a number of the families out to a refugee camp and on to another country. Paul's family had their affairs in order, paperwork in hand, and a place on the truck. With his family already in the truck, Paul looked around and saw all the Tutsi people left behind – knowing that nothing stood between them and the Hutu machetes. So, Paul let go of his wife's hand and the truck and he set his bridges on fire. Paul opted for something new – even if it meant losing everything. Even though Paul was reunited with his family eventually and did escape later, in that moment all the bridges were burned and life would never be the same. Paul Rusesabagina saved more than 1200 people, and said of his deeds later that it was simply the human thing to do.

The fraternity brother and Paul are not Jesus, they are just like you and me – amateur's. This world, God's world, God's expanding kingdom, its all in the hands of a bunch of amateurs – amateurs like James and John, Simon and Andrew, Paul Rusesabagina, the fraternity boy, (name five or six people who are sitting in the sanctuary) – YOU and ME. It's a strange way to do it, but that is the way God gets what God wants.

Mark 1:14-20 & Jonah 3:1-5, 10

“Helping!”

January 22, 2012

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”