

What about the others? (Matthew 4:12-23)

¹⁸ *As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.* ¹⁹ *And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."* ²⁰ *Immediately they left their nets and followed him.* ²¹ *As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.* ²² *Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.*

Matthew's account of the calling of the disciples along the Sea of Galilee has all the elements of a good Bible story. There is the decisive and compelling call to service sounded by Jesus himself.

There is the literary play on words in promising to make these Galilean fisherman "fish for people." And there is, of course, the unequivocal and exemplary response of faith and obedience by Simon, Andrew, James and John as they "immediately" follow the Lord.

All in all, it is stirring stuff and a model for our own discipleship, all packed into a few powerful verses, told with a directness and urgency characteristic of God's call through the Gospel.



"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Yet there is an image in these verses which disturbs me. An image which *seems* to be in contradiction to the dominant theme of commitment to Jesus and His ministry. It is Zebedee. It is Zebedee, the father of James and John, left standing alone in his boat. Zebedee so suddenly left alone by his sons. Zebedee, standing in his boat, watching his sons go off with this strange rabbi.

I don't know what Zebedee was thinking at that moment when his sons abandoned their boat and nets and left him there. Was he shocked? Angry? Confused? Disappointed? Or was Zebedee proud of his sons? Did he understand their call and their choice? Did he wish that he were younger, so that he, too, might follow Jesus? I don't know!

All we know for certain is that at that moment, the lives of all these people were profoundly changed by the choice of God through Christ to call each to a particular ministry. And this call was not given haphazardly; the actions of Jesus are imbued with the saving purpose of God the Father. For in the calling of Simon and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee - James and John - Jesus not only called these four to a specific ministry, but in letting Zebedee continue in his daily work, affirmed the worth and necessity of Zebedee's work as also being a "calling" of God.

Zebedee was, after all, a fisherman by *vocation*. In our secular speech, we commonly use this word in a shallow sense. But in it, there is always the echo of its meaning as a *calling of God*. In the proper and best sense, our work is our appropriate and faithful response to the call of God in our lives. It is indeed the fortunate person who experiences a job or career as a *profession*, - an affirmation and confirmation of that call, - and not just a job and a pay-check.

I'll grant you that I may be reading more into our Gospel text than may be justified. But I would like to think that Jesus' decision to call James and John to follow him, *and* his decision to let Zebedee continue his *vocation* as a fisherman are consistent with the Lord's actions in affirming and empowering His people in a wide variety of ministries to their neighbours.

And Zebedee's vocation *was* important. It was crucial to the lives of the people in the area, - it supported his family, it nourished his neighbours, it employed a crew for his boat. In our commercial concepts, Zebedee was an entrepreneur, a small business owner, a salesman, and a manager, an environmentalist. Through his vocation, Zebedee fed the hungry, provided meaningful employment, cared for his family, and contributed to the well-being and prosperity of his community. One could rightly argue, that in his vocation, Zebedee had more opportunities than most people (and most pastors!) to minister to the real needs of a great many people.

And perhaps in the diligent and pious fulfillment of his vocation Zebedee was also setting an example for his sons and preparing them for that decisive moment when they would encounter the Lord by the Sea of Galilee and follow His call.

I would like to think so, anyway. Because as his sons walked away from him to become disciples of our Lord and apostles of His gospel, Zebedee resumed the backbreaking and smelly daily work of a fisherman.

His sons went on to become “pillars of the church” according to St. Paul (Gal. 2:9). Jesus chose John and James, along with Peter, to be with Him at momentous events in His ministry - at His transfiguration and His agony in Gethsemane. Because of their zeal, Jesus nicknamed James and John “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). According to the tradition of the church, John was the author of the Fourth Gospel and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and to whom Jesus on the cross confided the care of His mother. It was John who ran before Peter to see the empty tomb and, seeing it, believed. It was John who was the first to recognize the Risen Lord by the Sea of Tiberias. James witnessed boldly for their faith and was the first of the original twelve to be martyred, being put to the sword by Herod Agrippa, as told in Acts 12:1-2.

James and John became saints of the church. But... there is no “Saint Zebedee”. At least, not in the Oxford Dictionary of Saints. But there should be!

There should be! Because the image of that old man, suddenly left there in his boat, watching his sons go off in obedience to a particular call of God is a reminder to us all that *God has also called each and every one of us* into a particular ministry of discipleship and service to Him and to our neighbour.

Luther stressed the sacredness and dignity of every vocation and its opportunities for ministry. In his commentary of the Sermon on the Mount, he wrote:

If you are a manual labourer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbour. Just look at your tools - your needle and thread, your beer barrel, [it is Luther, after all!] your goods, your scales or measure - and you will read this inscribed on them. Everywhere you look it stares at you...Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: “Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbour.” (LW 21,237)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states this more formally, but with great clarity and conviction:

*The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son.*¹

There is no limit to the possibility of that vocation. And although in every Christian tradition, we acknowledge a particular and very personal call to the ordained ministry of word and sacrament,² all members of the Church, again in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , have been

*“incorporated in Christ by Baptism...and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord. Following Christ and united with him, Christians can strive to be ‘imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love’ (Eph. 5:12) by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to [Christ] and by following his example.”*³

The reality of God's diversified calling is wondrously evident within the community of the Churches-on-the Hill. When the ministers of our churches come together for our monthly meetings, we have often stated our amazement, that the truly significant and marvellous ministry of this ecumenical community is done not so much by the ordained clergy (the successors, in an institutional ecclesiastical way, of James and John), but by, if one may say so, the successors of Zebedee - those church members who have felt the call of God in their lives and through the gifts and opportunities of their *vocation*, continue Christ's ministry of love, justice and reconciliation. Our most visible common endeavours - the Good Friday Walk, the Food Bank , and Advent services (which was so wonderfully celebrated here at Holy Rosary!) - are just some examples of church members living out their *vocation* as Christians.

Each and every one has chosen to follow Jesus. And our Lord has given each and every one of us our vocation as his people, and with that , each one of us has our own opportunity for service to proclaim God's kingdom. Amen.

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¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: Ottawa, 1994), ¶ 1877.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 879.

³ *Catechims of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 1694.