

Epiphany 3 – Josh’s Installation
January 22, 2012
Family of Christ Lutheran Church
Chanhassen, Minnesota
Pastor Kristie Hennig

Mark 1:14-20 “Called...Recalled...Installed...”

What would make *you* drop everything and take a new direction?

Your dream job?

Winning the lottery?

Hitting retirement age?

Romance? Parenthood?

A tragedy?

Fear? Boredom? Despair?

A persuasive, charismatic leader with a personal invitation?

I find it hard to fathom how these fisherfolk could just drop everything – *immediately*, just like that – and cast their lot with this carpenter from Podunk.

Did he show up at their workplace out of the blue?

We tend to imagine it that way.

But it’s possible that Jesus wasn’t a complete stranger.

The social media of the day – gossiping at the village wells – may have passed the word around about him and his message.

Some scholars think that the two sets of brothers –

Simon and Andrew, and James and John –

may have even been Jesus’ cousins,

and thus already well-acquainted with him

when he stopped by that morning at the lakeshore.

Still, even if the brothers *had* known something about Jesus before he showed up to recruit them for his team,

I still find it personally *very* hard to comprehend

how they could decide so quickly to leave all that they knew –

their livelihood, their families, their community –

for an uncertain future,

following a preacher without a shekel to his name
who was spouting some pretty radical ideas.
Maybe that's because my own journey has had such a different
trajectory.

Most people who hear a call to ministry and move in that direction
are ready in four years to serve a congregation.
It took *me* 23 years to finish my preparation to be a pastor...
from the time I took my first course at Luther Seminary as a young bride
till I was approved for ordination just weeks before my 50th birthday.

Of course I had followed other callings in the meanwhile –
including marriage, moving to Minnesota, a teaching career, raising
three great kids, non-profit work, lay leadership in the church –
so I hadn't exactly been twiddling my thumbs.
But there were obstacles in my path – the internal kind, mostly.
It took me a *long* time to let go of old patterns of thinking about myself
and my capabilities,
to let go of the messages I had grown up with about who I could and
couldn't be...
It took me a long time to work through those stumbling blocks,
and follow Jesus to a new place.

Pastor Josh has a call story.
In time we'll hear it, I'm sure.
Pastor Josh's story won't sound like mine – thank goodness.
It's *his* story – about the nets he's dropped,
the nets he's picked up and cast upon the water,
the fishing he's done.

Of course, all of us have call stories, don't we?
The first one for most of us is our baptism –
the moment when we were bathed in the liquid light of God's grace and
given Christ's name,
“Christ-ed”, “christened” as little Hayden was at this font today,

raised up from death to life,
to join God's family on the journey of faith.

Initially called in baptism to belong to God,
we are called and re-called throughout our lives.
Have there been times in *your* life when you've sensed God's hand
guiding you?
Maybe you've experienced a dramatic event,
an unmistakable encounter with the Holy that touched you profoundly.
Or maybe you've heard a still, small voice calling to you.

Most of us have scarcely even been aware of the nudging and pulling
that's drawn us in the direction we've gone.
But we notice doors closing, doors opening.
A gnawing sense of discomfort yields to a growing sense of contentment
and peace when we've stepped out in a new direction...
or returned to the familiar and the good.
We feel our priorities shifting,
a sliver of new light breaking in.

Since Pastor Nate Castens announced his intention to retire some two
years ago
after 30 years as pastor here,
this congregation has been nudged and pulled,
encouraged and challenged to celebrate the blessings of the past
AND to look toward the new day ahead.
During the in-between time we prayed together,

"Lord God,
you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the
ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown."
We pleaded for faith, for courage, for patience, for guidance,

and God's presence as we prepared the way for a new senior pastor to love and serve us,
a new leader who would help us follow Jesus' call to love and serve our neighbors.

And Pastor Josh, we prayed for you and your family and the people of the church you would leave...
even before anyone knew who the call committee would choose.

As seems so very plain to us today,
Pastor Josh Nelson has been *re-called* to lead this Family of Christ for the next chapter of our life together.

Brought by his parents to a kitchen faucet for baptism in Brazil, where he was christened God's beloved child,
in time Josh Nelson was also called to be brother, husband, father, and pastor.

Following Jesus led him to Family of Christ the first time, as this congregation issued Josh the call to be associate pastor, and he and Beth, Bergin, and 2-month-old Leif moved here from Ohio in 1995.

After serving this congregation for 4½ years along with Pastor Nate (during which time Solveig was born)

Pr Josh said good bye in 2000 to follow a call to start a new church,
which became Spirit of Joy in Buffalo, Minnesota.

And now, some 12 years later, he has returned –
re-cycled, re-freshed, *re-called* by the Lord through this Family to a *new* role here.

Today as Pastor Josh is officially installed in the office of senior pastor, we gain a fellow traveler to journey with us in the callings to which we all have been called.

Each of us has individual callings, of course – relationships and responsibilities, vocations and interests which God uses to bless *us* and the world *through* us.

But it's the call we share as a Family of faith, as a community, this congregation known as Family of Christ, that I want to hold up on this day to the light shining from today's gospel.

For Mark's story isn't simply about a rabbi signing up his first students...

or even the story of a gifted CEO selecting those who would become his trusted VP's.

Jesus was no solitary mystic looking for devotees, either.



In Mark's gospel *Jesus is creating a new community*, a community of ordinary folks whom he will teach to love and serve their neighbors, who will in turn teach others because they have become his hands and feet and heart in the world. Because right from the start he knew he needed a succession plan. He knew he would be turning his life's work over to this community to carry it forward. And he knew they would need one another.

Jesus' call changes everything: for Simon, Andrew, James, and John and for us at Family of Christ.



The Lord we follow and serve is much more than a mere “crowd puller”, much more than an A-list celebrity with star power, or a politician who can gain votes.

Jesus Christ is the Holy One,
Creator and Redeemer of all that was, is, and will be.
He transforms lives.

To those who strain to hear his call,
who look for a sign that he is close, approachable, knowable,
indeed, that he is real...

Jesus says: “Here it that sign. Read it again.”

It was that great theologian Yogi Berra who said,
“If you come to a fork in the road, take it.”

Well, that’s where we find ourselves today, friends.
Our best years as a faith community are ahead.
God in Christ is now here.
And our senior pastor is in place, too.
How glad and grateful and hopeful and excited we are!



Now that our prayers have been answered,
we must look into our hearts and decide...

What is Jesus calling us to leave behind,
as we follow him down new paths to new ventures?

And what is our Lord calling us to do and be and give –
you and me, Pastor Josh, all of us together...
what is Jesus calling us to offer up to help build the kingdom of God?

The journey continues. A new adventure begins.

Thanks be to God!