



**WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Knoxville, TN  
January 21, 2023  
The Rev. Dr. Richard Coble  
Sermon: "Jesus Calling"

**Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)**

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

1:16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.

1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

1:19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

1:20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**"Jesus Calling"**

Well, how was your week? Anything eventful happen in your lives since we last gathered?

A fun fact about me, pertinent to this week: I don't like sitting still. I grow restless easily.

I'm not much fun in a snowstorm.

An example: in Spring of 2020, when the shutdown began, I had no idea how to work remotely. I guess none of us really did, back in those days.

Lindsey, my spouse, was 6 months pregnant with our daughter and still working in her allergy clinic. Our son was 4 years old, and his preschool shut down, like all schools, in March of that year. I remember having a conversation with my boss, the head of staff at my last church. Without her prompting, I began to brainstorm how I was going to still get 8 straight hours of work in at home, and also look after Joseph, every day. All I had to do was wake up at 4am, worked straight through until Lindsey left for work. Then I would get an hour in during her lunch break, and then 2 hours every evening. The perfect plan.

If memory serves, it lasted about a week, until the adrenaline wore off and exhaustion set in.

If I'm honest, this restlessness comes from a place of anxiety, even insecurity. It's like there's a part of me that wonders, if I'm not moving, not performing, not accomplishing or producing - what am I worth, really?

Do you ever feel like that?

Do you ever question your worth like that?

This week brought up those memories, though thankfully our shut-down will not nearly be as long or critical – well, it is Saturday afternoon, and I'm starting to wonder if the kids will ever go back to school, but still, let's keep reminding ourselves this is temporary.

This week, as we've been watching the kids – now we have the added layer of trying to keep up with schoolwork from home, and I've been answering calls and emails, taking zoom meetings, thinking through a sermon, doing everything and nothing all at once, all at the same time, that old familiar restlessness has started to set in as the days wear on.

Have you felt it, that same restless spirit?

One day, as I was distracting myself on Facebook this week, I came across a poem by a colleague in ministry, the Rev. Andrew Taylor-Troutman, pastor of the Chapel of the Pines, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

A song for you (it begins)

Who jogs bent over / To one side / Pulling a kindergartner / By the hand into school

The tardy bell/ Already rang

Four shoes / Clip clop / The sidewalk

Hope / You can hear / The music<sup>1</sup>

That one hit hard. Andrew and I are in similar places in life, both fathers of young, school-aged children. Both pastors of busy Presbyterian congregations. His poem spoke to me, because I'm at a point in my life, where I find myself, often, precisely in that place:

Walking to school, already late. My son a few paces behind me. Me, a few paces before him, trying to hurry him along. *We're late already*. Or, if we're on time, we're going through a spelling list. Going through our plans for the day. Going through something, always something, that needs to be done, needs to be addressed, needs to be learned, needs to be said.

Underneath all that, is the sound of our feet. The music of our feet. The sounds of something I am so deeply grateful for but rarely, in my restlessness, do I ever take the time to notice it:

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<sup>1</sup> The poem was shared to Facebook, and I shared a screen shot of the post in the video to the service. For more on Rev. Taylor Troutman, see <https://citppc.org/staff/meet-our-pastor/>

Four shoes / Clip clop / The sidewalk  
Hope / You can hear / The music

Do you ever stop to hear the music?

I believe this is what Jesus was asking, as he walked through Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.”

So often when we hear the word ‘repent,’ we think of something we’ve done, that we need to feel ashamed or guilty about. That’s not what Jesus has in mind here. The literal translation of the Greek word, means ‘turn around’ or ‘to change one’s mind.’ In other words, it’s less about shame or guilt and more about paying attention. Turn around, for God is doing something new, right here, right before your eyes, but you’ve got to turn to see it.<sup>2</sup>

That’s exactly what Jesus means when he calls his first disciples. All were fishing professionally. Simon and Andrew were likely fishing from the shore, which meant that they were poor fishermen. While, James and John, in contrast, were on a boat with their father and his hired men, meaning they were of a higher economic status. In either case, the command for their attention is the same: “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

In both cases, the disciples put down what they are doing, turn around, and follow Jesus. They leave one system, the system of wages and economy, where your value is dependent upon your labor, and your wealth often depends on whose family you come from. They trade all that for another, the good news of God, where your value depends on

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<sup>2</sup> I learned about these possibilities from a Bible Project Podcast about a similar verse in Matthew. See BibleProject Podcast, “The Hebrew Bible’s Connection to the sermon on the Mount,” January 8, 2024. <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/hebrew-bibles-connection-sermon-mount/>

nothing except grace. “Turn around, and believe the good news,” Jesus says.

Before they followed him, there isn’t any indication in the text that Jesus knew them beforehand, or that they even knew exactly what they were getting into when they responded to his call.

There was no test to pass. Jesus didn’t make them recite the Apostle’s creed (it wasn’t written yet anyway), or even their knowledge of the Jewish law. They weren’t called because they had the right beliefs, lived the most pristine lives, had the strongest character to begin with. They were simply mending their nets. Bent over, consumed with what was before them, and Jesus called. They turned around, and followed.

To me, the Presbyterian understanding of baptism is one of the clearest expressions of Jesus unconditional call that we practice. It doesn’t matter who you are, where you come from, how old you are, or – in the case of infants and children – if you can even comprehend what is happening. We Baptize as a way to sign, seal, and proclaim the unconditional love of God for each and every one of us. God’s claim upon our lives. God’s naming us as beloved.

Many of you know I grew up in the Southern Baptist tradition, which, true to its name, practices believers’ baptism only, and, at least in my home church, it was only baptized believers who could take communion. And while there is a beautiful and well thought-out theology behind those practices, one of the reasons I became a Presbyterian is because my experience of God aligns much more with our practice of the Sacraments.

It is often when I have my head down, restless, working and worrying, constantly questioning my own self-worth, in a world that tells me I am only worth as much as I can produce and where I come from, it is then, not in my worthiness but in my greatest time of need that I have nonetheless, experienced the unconditional grace of God, who calls,

over and over again, to look up, turn around, pay attention, to the beauty and mystery of this good creation, and the people around me.

Have you heard that call?

This is what Baptism means. It is our way of looking up and saying in word and in deed, that each of us is God's good creation, claimed, loved, and called unconditionally.

Because Christ called the disciples before they had the right beliefs, before they had accepted Jesus into their heart, before they even knew who Jesus was. He called simply because he wanted them to look up, to see the new thing God was doing in their midst.

And every time we Baptize a child or an adult, God is asking us also, to stop, turn around, to see the beauty of God's good creation and God's beloved people, beloved and called not by works but by grace, grace poured over us. That is what we proclaimed today when we Baptized Jackson. That is what we must remind ourselves of, every time we come to the font.

Perhaps that was the message of this past week as well.

Many of us were asked to stop, to cancel all our plans, to close our offices, to pause, and reflect, that we and the people around us are so much more than what we do, what we produce.

Others of us were called to do the exact opposite. I know of some in our Westminster family who, rather than staying home, were not able to go home at all, but stayed overnight in medical facilities or other service places to care for those most vulnerable and in need, in this time. And in that way, they too proclaimed the unconditional grace of God through their care.

In both cases, and in so many others, we were called this week out of our routines, to remember that we are so much more than our routines.

Did you hear it?

Did you see it, this week, the good news of God?

It is never too late, to turn around, and hear Jesus calling. Amen.