

Third Sunday after Epiphany January 22 2023

Matthew 4:12-23

Esme, let me tell you a story.

In these waters that will fall upon your head today, God calls you. Just as he called me, and your grandfather, and most of those in this room through those waters. A call that gives us our identity. One that is even more important than lover of the Springboks. One even more central than child of Abby and Blaine. One that you will bear soon- beloved child of God, with whom God is well pleased.

You should feel good about that, because those were the words God used for God's own Son and God loves Jesus. A lot. And God loves you, a lot.

Being called means you are chosen. Now, you will be chosen for many things over the years ahead, I'm sure. Maybe for a kickball team on the playground, to lead a trip, to join a club. What a wondrous thing it is to be chosen. Picked to do a particular thing. A warmth swells up in you when it happens, pride at being chosen, of the recognition that you have these particular gifts. Ones that are needed here, now, in this task, in this place. That someone wants you. Values you.

Calls you, based on the gifts and abilities that are unique to you. Given to you by the God who has called you beloved child.

Now, here is the part we sometimes have trouble with. The call is to be a beloved child. Not to achieve it, or work for it, earn it. But to rest in it. Live what you are. To be a child of God. And that is something that is both incredibly easy, and deceptively hard.

Easy because you know about being, right now, don't you. Your world is filled with it, eating, sleeping, burping, pooping, crying. Being a baby. And it is also filled with learning, something new, every day. Discovering new wonders as your eyesight improves and you watch mom and dad. Discover the delights of this beautiful creation God has given us.

Life as a beloved child of God is that easy- just being who we are already called and gifted to be.

It can also be challenging. Mostly because of this thing called sin. I won't bore you with a deep theological conversation about that right now (we'll save that for confirmation) but at its core, sin is that doubt that we are beloved children of God, that God really does know what is best for us. Sin is the belief that we can do this thing called life better on our own.

And so, it can be challenging when Jesus, God's Son, calls out to us, Follow me! Play follow the leader with me (it's a fun game, you'll learn it). Go where I go, do what I do. Challenging, because of what Jesus does and calls us to do.

To love not just your parents and grandparents, your best friend but also your enemy. To love those who will chase after you to do you harm. (I told you this would be difficult). To love God with all that you are- your heart, soul, mind, and

strength. To love your neighbors as you do yourself. Even when you don't think they deserve it (and believe me- you'll find yourself thinking that).

To risk sharing what you have with others who don't have as much (yes, even that favorite toy) because you understand that everything is a gift from God anyway. To say, I'm sorry when you mess up and I forgive you when someone else messes up.

To follow after Jesus- teaching others about Jesus and the God who called you through the waters of baptism. Who gave you an identity- beloved child of God. Proclaiming in word and deed all the good things God in Jesus has done for you. The way in which Jesus is beside you through thick and thin. The way God comforts you when you are hurt, or the storms are raging outside. The way in which you find life with God, following Jesus, is fuller and more abundant than life lived on your own. Speaking and acting to heal those around you who are sick, in mind, body, and spirit. Doing the simple and challenging work of just, being who you are called to be.

But when we do lay down those things that seem so important to us right now, our own way of doing things, that seem right to us. When we lay those down and follow Jesus. Amazing things happen.

Because it isn't just you who are following him. It is hundreds, thousands, millions of other children of God responding to that same call. And just being children of God. Citizens of the Kingdom of God. A kingdom, a reign that Jesus tells us about in the gospels. That he lives out. Calls us to.

This is our call. Each and every one of us. To join Simon and Andrew, James and John, and drop everything that seems so important and follow Jesus. Not knowing where we are going, but sure that it will be a life fuller and more abundant than life without Jesus. Certain that this is what it means to be a beloved child of God with whom God is well pleased.

We do this together, in a community. Because we need each other for that life fuller and more abundant. We need the unique gifts and talents that God has given each of us (oh, Esme, I'm so excited to see what gifts God has given you). Gifts that we share freely with one another and the world. Gifts that make for that life fuller and more abundant. As we make quilts- like the one you get today, run the powerpoint so people can worship God. Bake treats and make coffee to feed us but also make space for us to learn more about each other. As we share a smile that brightens our day, music that lifts our hearts, voices that soothe our soul. What a gift we are to each other.

We are called to follow, together. As a community of beloved children of God with whom God is well pleased.

We follow, even though we know the one we follow winds up on the cross. Our leader, dead- in some ways because of us, but certainly for our sake. God's strength shown in what the world calls weakness. God's wisdom shown in what the world calls foolishness. After all, in this world real leaders are those who fight, take down their enemies ruthlessly. Not meekly die at their hands while asking God to forgive them.

But we follow because this is the Son of the God who loves us. With a love wider and deeper than even your parents. Can you imagine how great that must be?

We follow, because this is where Rob is going. And Andrea. And Rose. Because we love them too and want to be with them.

Why do we follow? Perhaps Andrew King put it best in his poem...

WHY YOU LEAVE YOUR NETS AND FOLLOW

([Matthew 4: 12-23](#))

Because your hope for that kingdom
has teased the edge of your thoughts
the way waters tease the edge of the shore

because his words stir that hope
in the depths of your soul
the way wind stirs the waves of the sea

because you sense that his love
like a sea without bounds
is as large as the needs of the world

and because he's called you by name
and the heart in you swims
toward that love, toward joy, toward home

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Esme and all you beloved Children of God. With whom God is well pleased. You are called. Come, let us follow Jesus- toward love, toward joy, toward home.