

Speaker 1: We are, as I said a moment ago and the fourth week of a series for the new year entitled, who are you? As I've said, giving him a new calendar year is a time when we often times reassess the direction of our lives. We ask questions once again about who we are and about where it is that we're going in life and as we take this journey into the question of who we are, inevitably we discover that it is closely linked to whose we are and the text that we're about to hear this morning from Matthew four describes the opening acts of Jesus's public ministry and the reading that you will hear this morning. It's basically two different parts, two different scenes that take place in the first you'll hear how John the Baptist has been arrested, how the powers that be have silenced him. That creates and clears the way for Jesus to work in Galilee.

Speaker 1: You'll hear the name of some of the cities and the towns and the regions, the tribal allocations in the Canaanite land that God had sworn to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had shown to Moses. Matthew in this section of text is essentially showing his readers that these lands, which were a divine gift to God's people, were now occupied by Imperial powers. And the suggestion of course, is that this new leader, the long awaited Messiah, would return to the land we, the land to the people of God, that their land would fall under the kingdom of God and not the reign of the empire. Just a moment ago, we prayed that your kingdom will come, Oh God, on earth as it already is in heaven. This is what Matthew was talking about in that moment. And then in the second scene this morning, we'll hear the story, how Jesus calls two brothers, two sets of brothers to be his followers, his, his disciples that are fishermen will hear. And Jesus in this moment comes in and completely disrupts their life, calls them to a, a different loyalty, a different way of life to uh, gives them a new mission. New purpose gives their lives new meaning in this moment. And as you will hear, they go immediately without any hesitation. So in this moment, I invite you to hear this word that comes to us from Matthew chapter four.

Speaker 2: The scripture reading comes from Matthew chapter four verses 12 through 23 now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee, he left Nazareth and made his home and Capernum by the sea and the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled land of Zebulun land of Naphtali on the road by the sea across the Jordan Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned from that time Jesus began to proclaim repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter and Andrew, his brother casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen and he said to them, follow me and I will make you fish for people. Immediately they left their nets and followed him as he went from there. He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee, and his brother John in the boat with their fathers deputy mending their nets. And he called them immediately. They left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people, the word of God for the people of God. Thanks for you to go.

Speaker 1: Four, I began this morning, if you will allow me a moment of personal privilege. Today is my mother's 80th birthday. And uh, she watches our livestream faithfully every Sunday before she goes to her church in Northern California this morning. She is on a 16 day cruise to Antarctica. So I'm not exactly sure if she's watching this morning. Uh, but mom, if you're watching happy birthday, I love you very much. We've joined it. Me in prayer, please turn 11. God may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts, the acceptable and pleasing to you or God, may they bring you joy. Well, we pray this in your Holy and sacred.

Speaker 1: I know of a nurse that serves in a hospital on a pediatric ward. And as she is making her rounds, checking the vital signs, the children that she works with before she listens to their heart, she always puts her stethoscope into the ears of the children and lets them listen to their own heartbeat. And as you can imagine, their eyes always light up with awe. But there was one boy, his name was David. And as she went and sat beside his bed, she gently tugged the stethoscope into his ears and place the disc over his heart. And she said, listen, listen, what do you suppose that drew his eyebrows together in a very puzzled line? And he looked up as if lost in the mystery of the strange tap tap, tap deep in his chest then and then his face broke out in a wondrous grin.

Speaker 1: And he said in that moment, is that Jesus knocking on my heart and the text before us today? I think we see Jesus knocking on the hearts of those would be disciples. I mean, how else can you explain it, right? Jesus early in his ministry is walking by the sea of Galilee and as he's walking he calls out to a couple of different folks, Simon, who will later know as Peter and Andrew, his brother and simply says, follow me. Well, these were people that were working as their jobs, as fishermen. My guess is that they were fairly good at it. They were making a life at it, follow me, he said, and I will make you fish for people.

Speaker 1: And Matthew tells us that immediately they followed a little further along the Lake. He comes across James and John, old man, Zebedee's sons and these two were sitting in a boat with their father and they were just mending their fish nets and and Jesus made the same offer to them and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning both their boat and their father in that moment. I've always been fascinated by the story. I mean what would compel these men to literally drop everything to follow this itinerant preacher who some were saying might be the Messiah.

Speaker 1: Jesus was knocking on their hearts. I don't know any other way to explain it. And so this morning I want to ask a question of you. What is God calling you to? How is Jesus knocking on your heart? Last week we learned that God has called us by a special name and this week I want us to consider that that God has called each and every one of us to a very special purpose. That God has planted something in us, that all of us have a God given call, that God calls us for very special, special, specific purpose in life and that this call is what gives our lives meaning it's what gives us purpose. Bill shore used to be in politics. He served as a chief of staff for a couple of us senators, but now he runs an organization called share our strength. It's an effort to end childhood hunger.

Speaker 1: He's also written a fascinating book called the cathedral within and he basically says that it's a basic human need, sort of like water or calcium for our lives to have a lasting impact. That's what makes us whole. It's what is what we sense gives our lives meaning and purpose. It's what makes our lives count. In essence, the title of this book, the cathedral within his, what he gained as he traveled through Europe visiting, uh, cathedrals amazed by their beauty and thought about the workers that helped create those and build those, those cathedrals would sometimes take generations to build.

Speaker 1: And yet these cathedral builders, he was inspired by their, by their faith, they devoted their entire lives to building something, something that most of them would never see finished. I think one of the reasons that the church universal today struggles is because we've lost sight of this sense of vocation. That may be the reason that all of those beautiful cathedrals in Europe are mostly empty on Sunday morning is that we have lost touch with the idea that we are all called by God, that we all have this special purpose that has been gifted us to God. A few years ago there was research done around this notion of Christian vocation and they asked a bunch of preachers and, and most of them said that, that this theme of vocation was a significant theme in both their preaching and their teaching. But there was a disconnect because when they asked and interviewed the people in the pews, most of them said that they didn't have in any way, shape or sense. Uh, they didn't feel that they were called to something.

Speaker 1: Members of these churches stated that what they did outside of church didn't seem worthy of God's attention. That there was a disconnect between their career and their calling. William Sloane Coffin was one of my professors in seminary, and I remember him talking one day about the difference between a career and a calling. And later he would write about this in one of his books, he said, a career seeks to be successful. A calling seeks to be valuable. A career seeks to make money. A calling seeks to make a difference. He pointed out that career, the word career comes to them, the same Latin root as the word for car. That word is Carerra. It means race track. Now when we think of a race track, what it conjures up different images for us, doesn't it? Oftentimes it's, it's a matter of going in circles as fast as possible and very competitively. And I asked this morning at the nine o'clock service, does that sound like anybody else's work life to them going in circles as fast and as competitively as possible. A calling though comes from the Latin word Boccaccio Carre, which means to call.

Speaker 1: Conference says this, he says, a career is a skill that you learned that helps you get from here to there what your calling requires you to question, to listen deeply in order to discover whether there is going to be worth going to in the first place. This is my favorite line of all. He said, a career helps you win the rat race, but a calling reminds you that even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat. When I was a student across the street at TCU in the late eighties there was a sign on the wall and the career center that simply said, the hell with your career. What's your calling?

Speaker 1: I mentioned a book a few weeks ago by Parker Palmer called let your life speak and in it he says that life what he refers to as our true calling, our vocation life is not a goal to be achieved, but a gift to be received. Your calling is not a goal to be achieved, but a gift to be received. Let your life speak. The title of that book is an old Quaker sing. It means let

the highest truths and values guide you live up to those demanding standards in everything that you do. Several years ago I heard Mike Yakin LA challenge, a large group of high school students to discover what they were called to do in life says that that quest may be the most important quest of your entire life. He says, when you and I are called, it's the most important thing ever. You said that we're all called to do something in life, and when we do it, when we live out our calling in that moment, we can feel God's pleasure.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Connelley went on to say that this, this is what the Christian life is. It's God capturing our heart. It's discovering what it is that God wants you to do and then having the faith and the courage to go do it. That he says is what the Christian faith is all about. And so perhaps grace in its most basic form becomes courage that allows us to say, I'm going to do what God wants me to do, not necessarily what the world wants me to do. I want to focus more on making a living and making a difference, a vocation in campuses more than the work that you were paid for. Most of us, I would imagine, need to do something in order to earn money in a few earned money for their through their vocation, but not all of us do some find purpose through what they do for money, but not everyone does, but our vocation or calling from God may or may not necessarily be our work, but it is always how we do our work. For instance, I once heard of a man in Oregon who confessed that he was called by God to be a used car salesman. In addition to treating everyone who comes to him with respect and honesty to things that we don't always associate with used car salesman that he sees his possession position as an opportunity to help those with little money buy a car that allows them to get to and from work. It's his calling, he says is ministry.

Speaker 1: John Ortberg tells a great story in his book when the game is over, it all goes back in the box. It tells of a speaker named Barbara who was brought in for staff development for a grocery store chain and she came in to talk to the employees of this grocery store about how people can make a difference in the world and about a month later she received a note from a 19 year old bagger in that grocery store by the name of Johnny and Johnny proudly informed her right away through that note that he had down syndrome and then he told her this story. He said, I liked what you talked about, but I didn't think I could do anything special for our customers. After all. He said, I'm just a bagger. And then he had an idea, he decided that every night when he got home from work that he would find a thought for the day, something that he would use for his next shift and it would be something positive, some reminder of how good it was to be alive, about how people matter or how many gifts we are surrounded with. And he said, if I couldn't find anything I just think of something myself and write it down every night. His dad would help him enter that saying six times on a page and the computer. And then Johnny would print 50 pages and he would take to cut out each one carefully, cut out all 300 copies and then he would hand sign them each and everyone love Johnny.

Speaker 1: And then Johnny put that stack of pages next to him while he worked at the checkout line. And each time he finished bagging someone's groceries, he would put that saying on top of the last bag and then he would stop what he was doing and he would look them right in the eye. And he would say, I put a great saying in your bag. I, I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming here. Now that would be a great story,

but it doesn't end there. A month later, that store manager called Barbara, the one who would been called in to to lead that staff development and he said, Barbara, you won't believe what's happened here. I was making my rounds walking through the store the other day and and when I got up to the cashiers, the, the line at Johnny's checkout was three times longer than anyone else's. He said it went all the way down the frozen food aisle.

Speaker 1: The manager got on the loudspeaker and notice, pointed out that there were more checkout lines that were open, but he couldn't get any of those customers to move. They said, that's okay. We'll wait. We want to be in Johnny's line. One woman came up to him and grabbed his hand and said, you know, I used to shop in your store once a week, but now I stop every time I drive by because I, I want to get Johnny's thought for the day. It helps me, gets me through the day. Is he? Here's Johnny who is tapped into that gift that he has been given that purpose that God has planted in his life. And because of that, Johnny is doing more than just filling bags with groceries. Johnny is filling lives with hope.

Speaker 1: You see? Sure. Sometimes we need to be reminded that God calls us, all of us and each of us in a, in a unique way and calls us to open our lives to the, to the purpose that God has for us. That as long as we have a heartbeat, that we have a call in our lives, we have a gift that was placed in us, a gift that the world desperately needs and we neglect that gift at the peril, not only of our own lives, but at the peril of the world. And so church may we may we let our lives speak, never neglecting that call, that gift that God has placed within each and every one of 'em.