Children’s sermon topic: Coach/Mom or Dad calling

***God Calls, Are You Listening?***

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Lord and redeemer. Amen.

Jesus calls to Matthew and he immediately follows Him. He leaves his profession and invites Jesus to dine with him and some of his friends. Jesus is scolded for eating with “sinners”, but Jesus’ rebuttal strikes at the heart of the matter—He came to heal the sick and the lost, not to exclude them from His presence!

But why did Jesus call Matthew? Matthew was a publican, one of the lowest in his Jewish society because he was collecting taxes for their enemies, the Roman conquerors. And as was the custom, the tax collectors would charge more than the required amount for their own “salary” and the poor tax payer had no idea what the required tax was! What a scam! So Matthew’s ilk were not allowed into the synagogues or temple or to associate with those who could participate in the religious community.

Yet Jesus called Matthew to be one of his disciples. Two reasons come to mind—Matthew could read and write since he collected taxes for the Roman emperor; and Jesus was making a point of expanding his ministry by example of including a Jewish ‘outsider’ in his ranks. Either way, Matthew responded immediately to Jesus’ calling to follow him. SO…

God calls, are you listening?

Abraham heard God sending him to a country he had not seen and promised him heirs too numerous to count.

Isaac entertained God’s messengers when they told him that Rebecca would have children within a year—twins in fact.

Jacob, the conniver, wrestled with God’s messenger until dawn and received a blessing and a name change to Israel.

God calls, are you listening?

Moses heard God’s voice through a burning bush in the desert. Moses was reluctant to do God’s bidding for several reasons—he was a wanted man in Egypt, he was slow of speech, he didn’t know how his people would receive him. God convinced him that the Spirit of God would be with him throughout the Exodus and the saving of God’s people!

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Isaiah’s worship which he experienced after King Uzziah’s death purified him and prepared him for bringing God’s message to the people of Israel who had forgotten what God had done for them and had turned away from worshipping the Almighty. As we read in verse 8, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

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Jeremiah, a youth, pushed against God’s calling him to bring the message of salvation to the wayward people of Israel because of his age. Yet he answered God’s call on his life and suffered a great deal throughout his life while fervently bringing God’s word to the king and his people.

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Gideon was the least in the tribe of Benjamin which was the smallest of the tribes. Jacob was a conniver; Moses a stutterer; Hosea and David, shepherds. And the list goes on. God chose those the world might overlook to do precipitate God’s plan for humanity. Often God picked the weakest and perhaps the most insignificant so that we would know it was God’s salvation acts and not our own which brought about results.

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Peter, James, John and the other disciples were fishermen who left their jobs to follow Jesus and after three years were responsible for heralding Jesus’ message to a hurting world which needed to hear the good news of God’s saving grace through Jesus, the Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit!

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And of course, Saul who became Paul, met Christ on his way to Damascus to arrest those “Followers of the Way” since he believed them to be wrong. But God had other plans for Saul—that of mission planting around the then known world! Paul wrote most of the letters of the New Testament giving guidance to the young churches he established.

God calls us even today! I am privileged to sit on our District Committee on Ministry and hear many stories of how God through the Holy Spirit has called out to Christians wanting to serve the Lord through ordained ministry. Listen to this young person’s call:

My personal experience of God starts with my grandmother who required me to attend church throughout my childhood. Since a child, she instilled in me a deep reverence for God resulting in my fear of the Lord and regular attendance at service in our church. It wasn't until high school, however, that I started to know God for myself, and my personal relationship with God developed exclusive to that of my grandmother’s. In 2008, at a summer camp at Lakeview Conference Center, I gave my life to Christ and received my call to ministry. My “call moment,” for lack of a better term, was not extravagant. Rather, it came from a still peace as I led morning devotion, and it was confirmed through the constant affirmation of other ministers.

Since age 15, I have been on a journey to understand my calling more and to grow deeper in my relationship with God. I have further explored my calling while at the Texas Annual Conference Youth Academy, serving as the Conference Youth Council president for two years, and other opportunities to serve. These experiences in the Methodist church have helped to confirm my calling and allowed me to experience God in diverse ways. I consider each of these experiences as divine appointments, manifestations of the hand of God in my life, helping to shape my calling. It is with great confidence and humility that I express my call to serving the United Methodist Church as an ordained Elder and my willingness to offer my life to shepherd God’s people.

This young man wants to preach and bring others to know the love of Christ in their hearts and soul. But others are called to Christian service in other ways. Hear what an *Upper Room* writer has to say:

“A few days a week I volunteer in our church library. I often see a certain man walking down the hall with a screwdriver or a drill or a sander in his hand…When I ask him what he is doing he says, ‘Oh, I noticed that this needed to be done, and I thought I’d just come in and take care of it in my spare time.’

“Some think that to be a disciple means witnessing to hundreds or preaching to crowds, and many disciples do these things. But no less important is the disciple who cheerfully does the little things every day that make other people’s lives more pleasant and productive. We all have some kind of talent that we can devote to further our Lord’s kingdom. All we have to do is identify that skill or talent, decide to use it for the Lord—and then get up and actually do it.”

Or another devotional writer states:

“In my late twenties, a few years after I had committed my life to Christ, I was working as a computer programmer for a large company. One day I had been so unsuccessful in searching for an error in a computer program I had written that I began to question my vocational choice. I remember praying, ‘Lord, I would prefer to serve you full time.’ I had always thought that God called only pastors, church workers and missionaries to full-time Christian service. But that day, I sensed God telling me, ‘You already serve me full time. I have placed you with this company.’”

In my own call I thought God wanted me to minister with youth, so I prepared to teach school. As a sophomore teacher of English, I was inundated with about 150 10th graders each day, but I wasn’t able to get too close to many of them because I had to instill a love of literature and grammar and sentence structure, etc. And with 150 papers to grade and research papers to correct, I wasn’t getting anywhere.

Then one morning my former pastor telephoned and invited me to interview for a Christian education job back at my home church. He was insistent and I went and was hired. From then on I knew I was in the place Jesus had for me to serve—not to preach, but to teach children, youth and adults the freeing love of God through Jesus Christ.

How has God called you? How is Jesus calling to you to make a difference in this world? Are you listening to that still small voice tugging at your heart saying, “I want you.” Are you resisting this voice thinking that the work you are doing is unimportant in the Kingdom of Heaven? Are you willing to follow Jesus when he singles you out for a way to serve Him?

Matthew answered the call and followed the master. We don’t have much of a clue as to what he did after the resurrection of our Lord, but we do know that he invited his friends to sup with him in his home immediately after answering Jesus’ beaconing.

And Jesus was berated by the religious leaders of his day for dining with sinners. Jesus’ reply put all in perspective, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Even if you feel unworthy to accept Jesus’ invitation to follow Him, remember that He came to set things right and to accept you just the way you are. And to use you for the glory of God’s kingdom here on earth.

God’s calling. Are you listening?