

WGUMC January 21, 2018 "You Are Called"
Mark 1:14-20 and 2:13-17

A bunch of United Methodist women (and some men) were at the Women's March in San Jose yesterday. The feel in the air was that this is our year. Emily's List has received calls from over 26,000 women wanting to run for office this year. That compares with just over 900 two years ago. Thousands have heard the call and made the call, and as I marched in a sea of amazing women, the words of Jesus came to me: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

I wanted to say to these women: the good news is that Jesus is here. Someone who loves and respects women is here and his kingdom is near. If we could just let the kingdom come, let God's will be done, this evil would be on its way out and violence would be on its way down. Women who have been silenced would become strong. Men who wanted to stay in power would work to right what's wrong. And children, no

matter where they were born, would get the message that they belong.

I have to thank God even for bad news because it makes me ever more hungry for good news. It gives me a sense of urgency—I think we all need that—otherwise, we would never hear the call or have the courage to drop our nets, leave our boats and follow Jesus. What is true for society is true for Christianity. What I saw at the march, I also see in the church: the time is here; the need is great; the stakes are high; and the call is loud and clear.

Pastor Susan and I spent the week at Mount Hermon for the Gathering of the Orders. The bishop calls all ordained clergy together once a year to build relationships, deepen our commitments, and share with each other the joys and struggles of pastoral ministry. What the Gathering does for me is give me the opportunity to step back and reflect on my calling. It's so easy to get lost in the minutiae of ministry;

sometimes I have to be reminded of why I ever became a pastor in the first place.

When I got the call, I didn't have a clue what it was that Jesus wanted me to do. I thought I'd go to seminary and then become an overseas missionary or go into college chaplaincy. I never imagined that I would end up in parish ministry. But here I am because I love to preach. I love doing pastoral care. I love loving people, especially the ones who don't know what love is. I love listening to your stories and learning about your journeys.

This is why I do what I do: In the last few years, I have seen some of you, stuck in toxic situations, make healthy choices to change. I've known some of you, whose relationships have broken down, ask for the grace to forgive and go on. I have marveled at your strength to persevere, your patience through the disappointment and your determination to find a new purpose. I've been proud of you when you've not chosen the easy path but the faithful one.

I am a pastor because I love seeing the grace of God grow in you. The glimpses I get of your peace, your joy, your love for Jesus, makes all the budget meetings and building maintenance and the other busy work of ministry seem like a small price to pay for the privilege of having the very best job in the world.

But clergy are not the only ones with a calling around here. The job is far too big, the challenges are too complex, and the old ways are too resistant to change for pastors to do it alone. Note that Jesus didn't call any clergy. He called everyday folk. If you want to fish for people, you need some fishermen. If you want to collect people, call up a tax collector. If you want to preach repentance, better be sure there are some sinners in the audience.

The point is that all the raw materials (and I mean raw!) that Jesus needed to start a revolution of radical love were right there in front of him. And I strongly believe that everything we need is right here in front of us, too. Don't

believe the voices whispering that the church is dying. They've been saying that for decades. Besides, if you're a follower of Jesus, you know that death is not bad news. It's just the prelude to more good news. And we are a part of God's good news.

Here is our unique call: We have a chance that we haven't had in a couple hundred years to reimagine church. Even though this is not the most Christian part of the country, what better location for a faith revolution than here in Silicon Valley?

After all, the most innovative businesses in the country want to locate here. The most disruptive technologies are born here. Here is where long-held assumptions get challenged, old rules get rewritten and today's crazy new idea becomes tomorrow's manifest destiny. But to those who thought that Steve Jobs was some kind of god, I'd say let Jesus be the patron saint of Silicon Valley, because he was the power behind the most successful startup of all time. When it comes to

institutions needing blowing up, he wrote the book on disruption when he came preaching, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news."

This is the right time. And we are in the right place to hear that call, believe that news and help bring in that kingdom. But are we the right people? Most of us would resist that call. Like my dog at 4:30 this morning who wants to go outside and then won't come back in. She doesn't listen when I call. So I go get some of her treats. She couldn't care less. Then I went to get a piece of pastrami. Even then, I had to throw it at her. Finally she came in and I could go back to bed.

When Jesus called the disciples, he didn't have any pastrami. He just said, "Follow me." He didn't promise any treats. All he could give them was himself, even when they didn't know that that was all they would ever need. To each one of us, Jesus is saying, "Follow me."

If you are wishing you had call waiting, hear these words from the Apostle Paul: "'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" [Romans 10:13-15a]

The one who called Simon and Andrew, James and John, is calling you. You have the smarts; all we need is your heart. You have the skills; all we need is your will. You may think that you don't have much to offer or the time to offer it. But I happen to know that the Holy Spirit will take whatever you've got. She will throw in what someone else has and stir it up and shake it around and create something new and wonderful and profound that none of us could have come up with on our own. All I know is that I can't, you can't, do it alone. But I whole-heartedly

believe that it is possible to do it together. This gospel is worth preaching. This Jesus is worth following. This community, this church, is worth loving and serving.

If you agree with me, follow me. Make sure that I am following Jesus. Women are saying that this is the year we need everyone to get to the polls. I say this is the year we need everyone in the pews. In other words, you're hired. Not by me, but by God. I am hired, too, not by you, but by God. God has gotten us through some big changes in the past few years, and there's more to come. So this year, the Holy Spirit wants to gather a handful of you to meet and pray with me. If we are faithful, the Spirit will show us who God wants us to be, what God wants us to do, and where God wants us to go. At coffee hour, I'm taking names.

We could use some new eyes and new ears, so I give thanks for some new members this year. Usually, when we receive new members, we ask them questions. But first, I want

to ask you some questions: Do you really want to follow Jesus? Do you yearn to experience the love of God in your life? Are you passionate enough about that love to share it with anyone else? Are you committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? Are you willing to give enough of your time and your treasure so that the good news of Jesus will always have a witness in Willow Glen? If so, answer, "Yes and Amen!"