

God's Imprint: Matthew 4:18-22

By Rev. Katie Hambrick Suddeth

Have you ever heard that newborns can recognize the sound of their mother's voices? This isn't just true for human newborns, but it is true about elephant seals too. Elephant seals are found in Argentina. Soon after birthing her baby, an Elephant seal mother is famished and will abandon her pup to go feed in the rich waters off the coast.

When she returns to land, she is surrounded by other mothers who did the same exact thing, and they all return to a different part of the beach than where they left their pup. They start to call out for their pup, and amazingly the pup will start to call back to her- they will then follow each other's voices and scent until they come back to each other.

Rodger Nishioka (nee-shee-O-ka) uses this illustration to convey how it is with God- he goes on to say that we are imprinted with a memory of God and God is imprinted with a memory of us, and even if it takes a lifetime, we will find each other.

Today's text in Matthew is a puzzling one for many reasons. One of those is the simple fact that when Jesus tells the brothers to follow him is that they immediately did- immediately. The text does not mention hesitation or them asking this crazy man who

he is. I don't know about you, but if some person came into the church office and told me to leave everything and follow them, I would probably tell them they were nuts.

The men though have the opposite reaction. It is almost as though they had been waiting to hear a voice- this voice. As if something in that moment went beyond human understanding and reason, causing the men to immediately follow.

Saint Augustine wrote in the first book of his confession that "our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." Maybe it would not be such a far leap of our imagination that though these men, who had a worthy vocation, also had restless hearts. Hearts that longed for something more- something deeper.

So when the men heard Jesus' voice, not only did they hear a voice they had been waiting to hear, a voice that had been imprinted onto their souls since they were born, but they heard a call.

A call to something deeper.
A call that came from a voice that made their restless hearts burn, and they were compelled to immediately leave their nets and follow.

Wouldn't it be nice if discernment was that easy? In a world full of media, facebook, and everyone keeping up with the jones,

wouldn't it be nice if it was that easy to determine which voice was the voice of God? Sometimes it is that simple. Sometimes we hear God loud and clear. Other times, it seems God isn't with us at all- much less talking to us, so we cling to whatever voices we can hear.

Rodger also tells a story about when he was the speaker at a youth conference. He preached on this scripture and about discerning God's call. After the service, a distraught young man came up to him and asked to speak with him. Rodger said of course, and the young man began to tell Rodger through tears, how for some time now he felt that God had been telling him to end his life. He felt that God was calling him to commit suicide because the world would be better off without him.

Rodger held onto this young man's arm as they cried together and prayed together. After a few minutes passed, he told the young man that Rodger did believe there might have been a voice telling him to end his life that Rodger did not believe it was the voice of God. The young man asked Rodger how he knew for sure, to which Rodger started by quoting Psalm 139, You have been fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. You are unique and one of a kind. And in John 10:10, Jesus says he has come so you may have abundant life. It does not fit God's nature

of unconditional love to call you to take your own life. God would not say those things to you.

Rodger argues that it is our responsibility to learn and know the person of God so well that we will be able to discern which voice is consistent with the God, who loves us and made us in his own image from the ones who are not.

It is as simple and as complicated as that. This voice is not foreign to us. It is a voice that is imprinted on our souls.

Some call it the spirit of Chi.

Some call it our consciousness.

And others call it the Holy Ghost.

The definition of imprint in relation to zoology is to come to recognize another being as an object of habitual trust. To have God's voice imprint on your soul means that you have a natural tendency to trust the voice of God. It is like how Glennon Doyle describes it- it is a feeling you get all over your body that feels like warm liquid gold running through your veins.

That is why when Peter and Andrew, James and John, heard the call from Jesus, when they heard his voice, they dropped their nets immediately. They trusted the authority of this voice and call. They recognized the power of this call and their restless hearts could not resist.

However, Jesus didn't just say to them follow me- he said to them, "follow me and I will make you fishers of men." This is not just a call to follow Jesus' path of love and liberation for yourself. This is a call to discipleship.

It reminds me of the parable of the talents. A master is going on a long trip. He calls in three servants, giving each of them silver to hold onto while he is gone. The first servant invests money and starts to make more money. The second servant also invests and also makes more money. However, the third servant digs a hole in the ground and buries the money- he just lets the money sit in the ground.

When the master gets home from his trip, he praises the first two servants for investing and spreading wealth, while he shares anger and disappointment for the one who buried it.

This parable is not about money, it is a metaphor for discipleship.

Sometimes the greatest thing we can do in this life is show the unconditional love and grace that God has shown us to others. Sometimes the greatest impact we have on this world is not the things we do, but the people we leave behind. The people that we have loved. The people we pour our hearts, time, energy, and soul into caring for.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the call to follow me was a call to absolute discipleship, and that only in surrendering ourselves to Jesus' command could we know our greatest joy.

Jesus' call has not changed much over the years. We are still being called to radical obedience just as the men in today's text were. We are called to follow Christ's path of love and liberation. We are called to share the good news with all of God's children. The demands of this call have not been reduced. It is when we decide to join in with radical obedience that we receive the joys of faith.

To be a Christ follower means to invest in people,
to invest in discipleship,

God can use each of us right where we are at with the unique gifts that each of us have...

Come fishermen, and I will make you fishers of people.

Come doctors, and I will make you healers of people.

Come teachers, and I will make you educators of people.

Radical obedience is the call- the call that is imprinted on our souls. Are our hearts not restless? Are they not ready to rest in the voice and the call that our souls have known all of their days?

Come children, and I will make you disciples. Amen

