

The Call

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on February 5, 1995, the fifth Sunday after Epiphany. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The year was 1928 - one year after Charles Lindbergh made the first solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean. It was the golden age of flying - the age of "barnstorming" - dare devil pilots crisscrossed the country doing dangerous acrobatics in their biplanes and selling rides for a dollar. My brother, Ed, was seven years old in 1928. My dad took him to see a movie - "Wings" it was called. It was about airplanes and flying. After that movie the only thing my brother ever wanted to be was a pilot. He'd stare longingly at the sky whenever a flying machine passed. On Sunday afternoons my dad would drive him to the old Dupont flying field to watch the airplanes take off and land. With the money he earned from delivering the Wilmington Evening Journal he walked up to Prices Corner and paid for his first airplane ride in a Ford Trimotor. He graduated from Conrad high school in 1941 and joined the Army Air Corp fulfilling his boyhood dream of becoming a pilot. After the war he reentered civilian life for a short time working at a liquor warehouse in Wilmington. But he couldn't escape his calling as a pilot. He became a charter member of the Delaware Air National Guard. He flew Sabre jets in Korea. In 1957, he got the assignment to fly a T-33 jet through the atomic dust cloud thirty minutes after the testing of an a-bomb in the Nevada desert. He flew C-97 transport planes to Vietnam in the sixties. He flew B-17s, B-24s, B-25s, B-26s, F-84s, F-86s, C-47s, C-97s and C-130s. You name it and he probably flew it.

I once asked him, "If you hadn't become a pilot what would you have done?" He said, "I can't imagine doing anything but flying." He felt called to be a pilot. It wasn't just a job. It wasn't just a way to make a good living. In fact he said, "I can't believe they paid me for what I loved doing all my life."

When did you first know what you wanted to do with your life? Do you feel called to what you're doing? Do you feel called to be a teacher or a homemaker? Do you feel called to business or to nursing? Do you feel called to your office or factory? Do you think of your place of work as simply a job or do you think of it as a calling?

You say, "I'm getting old, Ted, and I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up." Some people never feel called? They live their entire life without a sense of calling - without a vision of what God wants them to do with the good gift of life the Lord has giving them.

Do you feel called to what you're doing with your life? I didn't ask if you're happy with your job? God called Isaiah to be a prophet but his calling was very frustrating. People didn't listen to him. He wasn't happy with the response to his ministry, but he was called. The Lord called Peter, James and John to leave their fishing boats to catch people. They left everything and followed Jesus. But it wasn't all fun and games. They faced persecution and martyrdom - and yet there was nothing else they could do. The Lord had called them.

Some of you, because of lack of training, or because of lack of skills or experience simply don't have a choice about where you work. You feel trapped in

your jobs. And all of us go through periods in our lives when our work becomes drudgery. Stress eats at us and we live for the weekends or for our vacation. Retirement can't come soon enough. So you may not like your present job. You may not have a choice about where you work. But what if God has called you to your present work? Look around at the people where you work? Why could it be God has called you there - at least at this present time? What mission does God have for you there. To whom do you need to speak a work of hope? To whom is God directed to bear witness to Christ. You may not like your job, but a sense of call can transform your attitudes. I think of an old sixties songs that went something like this, "If you can't be with the one you love, then love the one you're with." "If you can't do the work you love, then love the work you do."

But many of us have choices. You high school kids have so many choices after high school - trade school - vocational training - national service - college - nursing - factory or busines. So often I hear kids expressing lack of direction in their lives. "I just want to get a good job and make money."

But what makes a job good? Is it simply money? What makes a job good is if you're called. If you sense God's calling. If you see that job as a field of ministry - a field of service to God and neighbor. So many gifted and talented people wander aimlessly through life doing one thing and then another - without a sense of calling.

When I was in Guatemala about ten years ago I was on a boat crossing Lake Atitlan. I found myself sitting next to a woman who spoke English. We struck up a

conversation. She was a Southern Baptist from the states and she was a medical doctor. Every year she takes a two month vacation in Guatemala. But she doesn't go to Guatemala to lounge on the beaches. She goes to a medical clinic where she heals Guatemalan Indians. She says, "I feel called. God gave me the gift of healing. God has given me so much. I feel called by God to heal these poor Guatemalan Indians."

Years ago I bought my first life insurance policy from a man in Portsmouth, Ohio. After all the papers had been signed and the deal was settled he sat back in his chair and he said, "Ted, I really feel God has called me to sell insurance. It's not just a way to make a living. God has called me to do something to help people have a little more financial security for themselves and for their families. God called me to be an insurance agent."

I think of a 40 year old man. He suffered brain damage when he was born and has been confined to a wheel chair all his life. And yet he managed to graduate from high school. His parents built a room for him adjoining their home. They lent him money to buy a machine to make name tags. He began making all different kinds of name tags and selling them - name tags that can be put on office doors - name tags to clip on clothing - name tags to attach to keys and suitcases. He developed a market for his name tags and made money - enough to pay back his parents. He borrowed more money and bought better equipment. His business continues to grow. He feels called. He doesn't simply have a job. He has a calling from God.

I think of a woman who has experienced a lot of pain in her life. But God has called her to bring a little joy into the lives of people who aren't as well off as she is. She visits shut-ins. She bakes cakes for their birthdays. She hugs people wherever she goes. She has a calling. No matter how young or old we are - the Lord Jesus Christ is calling us.

Jim Haughwout was a Mifflin County dairy farmer. Jim and his wife, Patsy, use to invite me to dinner every Sunday after church. This was before I was married. They had six children, three boys and three girls. He always seated me between the two daughters who were closest to me in age.

He was a real story teller...

One afternoon at the dinner table Jim told me about a vision he had as a young farmer. He wanted to serve the Lord. He wondered if the Lord was calling him to be a preacher. He wondered this especially when the pumping machine broke. So he prayed. And one night in the early spring the Lord gave him a dream. In the dream, Jim was standing in a field looking up at the sky. He noticed the fluffy white clouds spelled out two letters - "P" and "C". Jim had never seen clouds look like that before. He woke up and wondered, "What does it mean?" Then it came to him. "PC - preach Christ! God is calling me to leave farming and become a minister." He woke up Patsy to tell her and Patsy immediately responded, "It doesn't mean preach Christ, stupid. It means plant corn."

~~Jim was never one to let the facts stand in the way of a good story so I don't know if it really happened like that or not.~~ But ~~from~~ ^{from} that time on, Jim never doubted that God had called him to be a farmer. He became an elder. He taught

Sunday School. But God had called him to be a farmer. He became one of the most progressive farmer in all Mifflin County.

Ministers and missionaries aren't the only people who have a calling. God called Peter, James and John to leave their fishing boats and follow him. God also sometimes calls missionaries to come back to the states to work in factories. God calls taxi-drivers and machinists. God calls teenagers and retired people. God calls school teachers and auto mechanics. God calls rocket scientists and bricklayers. God calls hair stylists and construction workers. God calls insurance agents and homemakers. Christ calls all of us to follow him. He calls us to see our work as a mission - where we can live out our love for God and neighbor.

You probably will never have a vision like Isaiah. And you may never hear Jesus call you in the same way he called Peter, James and John. But the Lord is calling you. You have a calling. You have a calling to be the best that you can be at whatever you do. You have a calling to let God use you through word and deed to bring people closer to Christ. Seek that call! Obey that call! Say to the Lord, "Here am I; Send me!"

Let us pray: Here we are Lord. We have heard You calling in the night. Send us, Lord. We will go, Lord, if You lead us. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.