

Jan. 22, 2017

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Matthew 4:12-23
Epiphany 3

Call and Response



What a day yesterday! Women and men showed up in Washington DC for the Women's March on Washington to lift up equality and human rights and protest any threat to those rights. It was easily one of the biggest demonstrations in the city's history; and as night fell, not a single arrest was reported.



And over 600 sister marches took place around the country in states like Oregon with 17 marches in places like Eugene and Portland, Ashland and Florence!

How did it all start? With one **Teresa Shook** (a retired attorney and grandmother living in Hawaii), who couldn't sleep the election night of Nov. 8. The next night, with some help from friends online, she created a Facebook event page calling for a march on Washington after Trump's inauguration. Before she went to bed, she had about 40 responses. When she woke up, she had more than 10,000. It grew and grew with more leaders organizing across our country and the world. A movement. **Call and Response.**

There is a genre of music designated **call and response** where there is a leader and the group which sings a response to what the leader has just sung... and echo, another phrase. We probably know it best from our African American heritage.. but it crops up in early cultures all over the world. Maybe the earliest I remember is watching Lilies of the Field and Sydney Poitier singing "**Amen**".. Harry Belafonte singing **the Banana Boat song, Happy Day** from **Sister Act**, or in our own song books **Wade in the Water.**



Call and Response. We hear it in such groups as Lady Smith Black Mambazo and Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Call and Response... We do it every Sunday when we read our **Call to Worship**.. ... when we turn to the back of the hymnal and read our psalm responsively. We do it when Pastor Adam says, "**can I get an Amen?**" and you all respond.... **AMEN!!**

Call and Response. A leader calling out, and the people responding as a group.. together.

Today our scripture is a **Call and Response**. Today's scripture is another kind of **inauguration**. Remember we are now at the beginning of the liturgical year in which we tell our Christian Faith History. Our year begins in late Nov/early December with Advent.. anticipating Jesus' birth, which is Christmas. Now we are in the season of Epiphany. "The World" discovers Jesus in the wise men, he is baptized, and begins his ministry. All the stories in this season have to do with **epiphanies**.. discovering WHO Jesus is.



For those of us who have grown up in the church and heard the calling of the disciples so many times.. we have this idealized and perhaps have the wrong idea of what was at stake and how it all works.

Perhaps you've seen the commercial for car insurance where BEATRICE is in her living room with snapshots taped up behind her...she explains to her 2 seated friends:



" instead of mailing everyone my vacation photos, I'm saving a ton of time by posting them to my wall... it's so quick..!"

... and then goes into her nifty car insurance deal. One of the listening women contradicts her, and Beatrice counters: ***"I can un-friend you"*** .. to which her friend replies.. ***"That's not how it works.. that's not how any of this works."***

So let's see how this discipleship **call and response** works.

Our version in the Gospel of Matthew tells us this is a dark time for Jesus. He has just been tempted in the desert for 40 days. Now he hears that John the Baptist has been imprisoned. He chooses the town of Capernum as his ministry center... at the north end of the Sea of Galilee.. an important city in that trade moves through it, but definitely Gentile territory.



To begin his ministry, he recruits his staff: his disciples. Does he go after the brightest and the best? The big names? The ones who had *huuuge* monetary resources? He finds simple, probably uneducated fishermen do what their families have done for generations: fish. They know nothing else. It is their culture.. their life.. their rhythm... their identity. It's who their fathers had been.. what they were born into. They did the work. They fed their families. They were part of the local economy.

And into this mix comes Jesus.. the rabbi from Nazareth.

OK.. so we know how the story ends.. we grew up with the disciples in all of their successes and failures. But at this juncture.. this beginning.. this **inauguration**.. we have to pause and sit with the weight of what Jesus was asking of these men.. and the unhesitating speed with which they answered, not even weighing the consequences.

Think also.. that this is not a church Jesus is starting where he says, like **Adam beginning his new service**:

*"come and check us out.. see if you like it..
we're starting something new to connect you to God."*

Jesus did not say.. "**Come check me out and see if you like me..**" ... Jesus did not say "**Come believe with me... and stay with the life you already know.**" Jesus was saying "**Come**" (movement), "**follow**" (leave where you are right now with my lead), "**me.**"

How does someone do that? How do you make that kind of a snap decision? Matthew is very purposeful when he says "**immediately!**"



Call and Response.

What in your life have you said **yes** to.. a **call and response**?
How did your life change as a result of that **response**?

We NEVER know what the results of our decisions are going to be. But we can know for certain that we are going to change as a result of that decision. To stay safe is to stay the same.

I believe that we get to know ourselves in seeing our change in the **Call and Response** process. And others see a very powerful dynamic at work.

Think about these disciples.. backwater peasants from an obscure little country under Roman rule. But Jesus called them. Called them out of obscurity. Called them to a promise.. a vision.. a purpose that went beyond their finite lives.

Think about this:

We would NEVER have heard of any of them, had they not said *YES* to his call.



We would not have the opportunity to see first-hand how real, fallible/faithful human beings succeed and fail in this journey of faith.

We would not have the iconic figures of impetuous Peter.. and doubting Thomas.. and tax collector Matthew..

Maybe Jesus knew nothing about these men either;
maybe he was following the Spirit's lead;
maybe he was not looking for anything in particular in a disciple but a positive response;
maybe he knew that it would be in the next three years.. in THEIR community of faith that their faith would grow and their ministry would solidify.

We are known and know ourselves through the **call and response**..

Are WE still called to respond beyond "thinking" we agree with, or *like* a particular church?

In this passage, I see **FOUR** things for us to wrestle with here in our faith community:

1. Our Response has to include a **commitment to a community of faith**. Jesus didn't call the fishermen to independent journeys.. he called them to be TOGETHER on this journey.

Just like in **singing** our **call and response**, or speaking it.. there is a leader and a group. The group moves and harmonizes together. There is strength and power and beauty in the group.

And remember that these men are **not bait**



fishermen... they use nets... fish are caught **together...** the **community is** very important in our **call and response**. Yes, Jesus calls individuals, but he calls us to community! **He calls this church to community... to include, to walk, to BECOME** disciples on the Way with him. We learn and stumble and betray and heal and ... we BECOME together.

I love the story about **doubting Thomas** who when the disciples first told him the risen Jesus had come to them, he said he would not believe... why? He had been away from the group. When he returned to the group the next week, Jesus came again.

We are called to community.

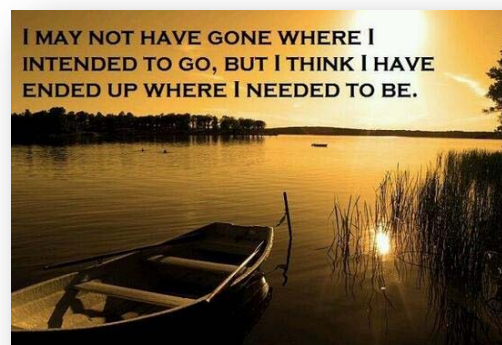
2. We are called to **movement more than belief**. Belief happens along the WAY... we learn together, WHILE we are moving, doing, changing, learning, challenged, risking, crying, laughing.



That's why mission trips are so amazing to vital community growth... as a group we move, we help, we get to know each other, we see our faith in action.

3. **We are not necessarily equipped but we learn on the way.** What are we now called to do? Can we make an immediate about face? Can we hear the words of Jesus saying "I know you're not a finished product.. I don't need finished products.. they get all haughty and proud and do their own thing. I want you where you do not know where you are going, but you have a willingness.. a naivete , a freshness to just get up and get going.

4. **Things change because of our RESPONSE.** None of this disciple stuff that Jesus called them to was for their own personal spiritual growth and edification. They existed solely to bring light in the darkness.. to bring God's message of grace and love and bringing people to a place where they could see God in these disciples .. through the way they lived, and taught, and healed, and their generosity, and sacrifice, and their love of God.



Call and Response ...

it's what we DO... together...

it's who we ARE together ..

and it's why we MOVE... together

And I leave you with a marvelous quote from **Douglas Adams:**

I may not have gone where I intended to go..

But I think have ended up where I needed to be!

Amen.