

I am sure some of you remember former United States Senator John Ashcroft, who also served as Attorney General during the George W. Bush Administration. A story has been told about his father, J. Robert Ashcroft. According to the story, in January of 1995, J. Robert Ashcroft had fewer than forty-eight hours to live and he was holding on to life, hoping to see his son, John, sworn in as a US Senator the following day. As his family and friends gathered around, J. Robert Ashcroft asked his son to play the piano while everyone sang, "We Are Standing On Holy Ground." After the song, the frail old man spoke some powerful words, saying, "John, I want you to know that even Washington can be holy ground. Wherever you hear the voice of God, that ground is sanctified. It's a place where God can **call** you to serve him. Wherever we are in our vocation.....that place is a holy place of service for Him."

Called! It is one of the great biblical themes. God **calls!** And, **all** who follow Jesus are **called**. **Wherever** we are, whatever our vocation, God calls **us**. Even in dubious places like Washington, DC. Even in places like Lansing, Michigan. Even in places like Okemos, Haslett, Williamston, East Lansing, Perry, Mason, Holt, Laingsburg, Owosso, Dansville, and

DeWitt, Michigan. Even in the most **unlikely** of places and situations, God calls **us** and that place is a holy place of service for God.

In today's gospel reading we hear the **call** stories of Simon, Andrew, James and John. All of these men were fishermen. Now, at that point in time, fishing was **not** a relaxing, easy job. It was hard, difficult, dirty work. There was nothing easy about it. Anyway, Jesus is walking beside the lake one afternoon when he sees these four fishermen working hard mending their nets and trying to catch fish. As he walks by, Jesus disrupts what they are doing and says to each of them, "Follow me."

Truthfully, the response of the four men is astounding. Their response is rather hard to believe, because Jesus essentially offers them a job with no pay when he says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." Jesus does not say, "Come, follow me, and make more money than you could ever make fishing." I could understand a response to that summons. But, no. Jesus' call and the response of the four really seems implausible. And, yet, the gospel reading today says they **immediately** dropped their nets, they **immediately** dropped what they were doing to head off to God-knows-where, to lives that were uncertain and a life they could not begin to imagine! Jesus comes along, **disrupts** their lives and summons them **from** the fabric of family relationships. He summons them

**from** the midst of the workaday world. And, he calls them **into** a whole **new** set of relationships and a brand **new**, uncertain vocation. I have to say, this is one big, heavy duty fish tale!!

Many of us, throughout life, face big decisions about family, about jobs, about faith. There are times in our lives when we stand at a fork in the road and have to make heavy duty decisions. Sometimes, there are experiences in our lives when we need to take risks. And, there are even times in our lives when we have to **sacrifice** something to follow Jesus. But, chances are that for most of us, the situation will **never** be as dramatic as it was for these four disciples. It is not very often that we drop **everything** to start a new life. And yet, the **call is** the same for each of us. Jesus comes along, disrupts **our** lives, and summons **us** from the fabric of family relationships. He summons **us** from the midst of the workaday world. And, he calls **us** into a **new** set of relationships, a **new** vocation.

God calls us, each in our own setting, to repent, to turn in a new direction, to open our lives to a radical reorientation that most likely will upset our neat little, hard-won patterns of comfort and familiarity. God calls each of us to follow and open our lives to a radical change that will, quite frankly, overturn our unquestioned assumptions and the privilege we enjoy without even being aware of it.

So, just how willing **are** we to have our lives turned upside down in order to follow this Jesus? Truthfully, we might have questions about such a call, a call where Jesus disrupts what **we** are doing and seemingly calls us to abandon family and occupation. Well, I really don't think Jesus asks us to **abandon** family or work. **But**, God calls us to live **differently** within those relationships. You see, our work and family life are transformed when God calls us to follow. The disruption in our lives and the call to follow is **not** to destroy, but to **renew**, and our lives **will** be changed and transformed in the process.

Yet, the call to follow **does** mean leaving something behind. Following Jesus means letting go of old securities and certainties. It means letting go of ideologies we hold dear, ideologies that are oppressive to others. It means leaving behind that which has enslaved us, leaving behind that which controls us, letting go of the fear that imprisons us, and letting go of our **need** to control. And, the call to follow Jesus means letting go of our self-centeredness, our narcissism, that importance of and intense focus on self. Remember what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "When Christ calls a man (or woman), he bids him (or her) to come and die." Following Jesus means dying to self and living a **countercultural** life. When Christ calls us he summons us **from** life's easy ruts of comfort and

safety to enter the future without knowing exactly where we are headed. But, the call to follow means trusting God and finding security in a **new** place. When we follow Jesus, it means we live our life under new management as Jesus becomes Lord of our life. To be called means we are invited **into** a relationship with Jesus, one that is **all** about love, grace and compassion.

And, as we follow Jesus, living in relationship with him connects us to a whole **new** set of relationships. We will find that the grace that calls and invites us and the love that transforms our hearts lead us to new places in life. And, transformed hearts lead us to live lives of compassion as we welcome **all** those we consider other, even those who think differently than we do. The transformation of our heart leads us to form some **new**, even **unlikely** relationships – sometimes relationships with people we would otherwise never meet. We will find that, just as the disciples were sent, we, too, will be sent to fish for people, carrying God's message of love and proclaiming the good news of a gracious God to a hurting, broken world. And, we will find there is nothing more sacred than carrying and proclaiming that news. We will find there is nothing more sacred than walking with people through life's painful times and sharing God's good news of grace. We will find there is nothing more sacred than walking with

people through tough, challenging times and sharing the good news of God's love.

God calls us every hour of every day, wherever we find ourselves, to share the good news of God's life-giving love in a broken world. As we live into God's call in our lives, it is God's love and compassion that will move us to do the work of discipleship. And, **wherever** we are called to serve, we will find ourselves on holy ground. I think that is precisely what J. Robert Ashcroft was trying to communicate to his son, John. When we live into God's call to serve and love others, we are standing on holy ground.