

At its most elemental level, a call is simply an invitation to come and walk with Jesus. For the first disciples, accepting Jesus' invitation to walk with him meant trekking along the dusty roads and byways of Palestine, and Galilee, walking with Jesus down to the Jordan River, climbing the rocky Jericho road to Jerusalem and finally up to the hill of Calvary.

For later disciples, walking with Jesus meant sailing across oceans and venturing across continents. For us latter day disciples, walking with Jesus means driving automobiles, staying current with email, showing up for vestry meetings, attending conventions, and receiving Primatial Communiqués. In every age, whatever its level of technology, the invitation to walk with Jesus has come to ordinary men and women like you and me. And the call is always the same: Jesus simply says, "Why don't you come and take a walk with me?"

Jesus' simple invitation certainly came to Peter and Andrew, James and John. It came to the first (and every) generation of Christians since, and hence down to you and me. Now, lest we think that walking with Jesus somehow separates us from everyone else or somehow makes us just a little bit better than everyone else, we'd better check out Paul's description of those Jesus invited to walk with him in Corinth. Paul says in today's reading, "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters...not many among you were wise...not many powerful, not many of noble birth..." Now, let me take a small liberty with Paul's words and put his description into the vernacular: "Well, God chose you as you are: stupid, weak, plebeian, fools," or as we might say in this part of the world, "Just a bunch of no-counts."

So here you and I are today, the descendants of our Corinthian forebears, gathered to remember in a particular way on this day that to each of us, as he did to those in Corinth, Jesus asked a very simple question: "Wouldn't you like to come and take a walk with me?" When you and I heard the question and perceived it as a call to ordained ministry, perhaps we thought we were something rather special. Turns out that we're really just ordinary. Perhaps we thought Jesus was calling us to walk with him because we are so winsome, or smart, or "religious" or just a wee bit better than other folk. We responded to Jesus' call perhaps thinking that saying yes to ordination was an invitation to take a walk with him in the garden. Well, it was. Trouble is, we thought Jesus meant the Garden of Eden. Truth is, it's more often like the Garden of Gethsemane.

How long did it take each of us, as an ordained person, to come to the realization that we're not so special; that our walk with Jesus as a deacon, bishop or priest is more like a stumbling walk down an unpaved road at night than zipping along a well-lit superhighway? How long before we realized that the walk with Jesus in ordination was more uphill than down? How long before we realized that our call to ordained ministry has at least as much to do with the transformation of our own hard hearts and stubborn wills as it does with ministering to the heartache of the world? How long after our ordination before we realized that walking with Jesus is sometimes more like a hike with a Marine Corps drill instructor than a stroll with our Brownie or Cub Scout Den mother? Accepting Jesus' invitation to take a walk with him is risky business, indeed, but we don't know that until we are already well down the road. So it has been with every person, lay or ordained, who has ever walked any distance with Jesus. If we're honest with ourselves, it doesn't take long before we realize just how ordinary we are, how much like our Corinthian cousins we are. It doesn't take many steps down the garden path in our walk with Jesus before the scales fall off our eyes and we see ourselves and the world in the glare of the Gospel light...and in that light to see just how far it is we have to go before we arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem and just how far down Jacob's ladder we truly are. Unless, of course – and we all know ordained people like this – one simply shuts one's eyes, pretends it just isn't so and creates a fantasy world of ministry.

But before we descend too deeply into a slough of despond (to put it in the vocabulary of classical spiritual practice), let's revisit that wise realist we know as St. Paul as he addresses our Corinthian ancestors: It's true that Paul calls them (and by extension, you and me), not smart, weak, foolish, and plebeian. But Paul says all of that to make a far greater point: God has a reason for calling you and me just as we are, in all our foolishness and weakness, and God called us for a purpose. Another way of saying that is that a walk with Jesus is not just a ramble...a walk with Jesus always goes somewhere. Listen again to Paul (somewhat paraphrased): "Now God's going to use you in all your weakness and foolishness to do some very extraordinary things. God's going to use

your stupidity to confound the wise of this world. God's going to use your weaknesses to show up the strong. God's going to use your ordinariness to bring to nothing the false pretense and illusory powers of this world. Now, brothers and sisters" says Paul, "Jesus is going to take you on a little walk, and on that walk, Jesus is going to fill you with a divine wisdom, he's going to present you and me with undeserved righteousness before God, and he's going to make you holy, and you're going to be Jesus' hands and feet in the lives of those you serve in his name. It's going to be a long walk, and not always an easy one; your heart will surely be broken more than once, and no doubt, your walk with Jesus will take you to Calvary on more than one occasion as you live out your vocation as priest, bishop or deacon. But brothers and sisters, don't fear...Jesus will hold your hand real tight the whole way, and when you get to the tomb, as you surely will in your ministry, you'll find that the risen Jesus will be standing right there, holding out his hand and your journey together will continue."

Now when Jesus invited you and me to take a little walk with him several things happened. First, Jesus invited us to get honest about ourselves and realistic about the world. That's the honesty about ourselves Paul is pointing to in our reading from Corinthians today, and that's the self-awareness Peter came to when he heard the cock crow early in the morning on Good Friday. Next, we have to realize that God is faithful, that God never abandons and that no lasting harm ever comes to those who walk with Jesus. Pain and difficulty, yes...that's part of being a sinful person in a broken world. But in the end, Jesus redeems it all through his love. And Jesus never sends his servants out into life and ministry unequipped. Finally, Jesus gives us three things, three wonderful gifts as we walk along with him through our ordained ministry.

First, Jesus gives us a vision for our ministry. Jesus gives us a vision of life as it can be and will be when energized by God's love and forgiveness. Jesus gives us a vision for ministry, not of life in a rose garden, but one of life in a city...a heavenly city...a heavenly city where injustice is wiped away and oppression of one human by another is eradicated...a vision of a city where disease and death, hunger and fear are banished forever...a vision of life in which each human being, no matter how broken or sinful is given divine dignity simply for being made in God's image...a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem where love of neighbor trumps service of self...a vision of the divine city where evil is revealed for the hollow shell that it is and where all grow strong and bright as they feast on the flesh of the true Paschal Lamb. And that's a vision that you and I can build a life and a ministry around in our walk with Jesus.

Second, Jesus gives us a voice for our ministry. Strangely enough, it's our own voice and no one else's. We don't have to preach like Peter or pray like Paul. We don't have to write volumes of systematic theology or become a Primate in order to leave a legacy in the world: our legacy will be written in the lives of those we serve in Jesus' name. On our walk, Jesus teaches us to use our own voice, to say the Gospel in our own words, to live the Gospel in the context of our own life, for that is what Jesus treasures in each of us. And Jesus teaches us to use our voice to pray, pray, pray...for the world, for ourselves, and for one another. Just use your own voice, says Jesus, and bring it to me in constant prayer. I'll be right there with you, every step of the way. Just stay in touch, says Jesus, because I know when you're left to your own devices, you get lost in the imagination of your own heart, and you're prone to wander.

Third, along with a vision and a voice, Jesus gives us a vocation. (That's the fancy word for taking a walk with Jesus.) A vocation, voiced with our own voice and rooted in a heavenly vision of life as it is truly meant to be in God, a holy vocation rooted in God's mission in this wounded world: feeding the hungry, binding up wounds, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, clothing the naked, freeing the prisoner. This vocation that God has given and called us to as ordained men and women is rooted in heaven, chained to the earth, grounded in prayer, proclaimed in preaching and made concrete in mission.

Thank God for calling each of us to the ministry entrusted to our feeble hands and weak hearts...but they are also hands and hearts made Gospel strong...for that is the promise when Jesus asks, "Wouldn't you like to take a walk with me?" And we respond by saying, "Why yes, Lord, thank you, I'd like that very much. And by the way, Lord, do I get to put the collar on now?"