

Fred Craddock tells of the time when he went into an unfamiliar grocery store

to buy a jar of peanut butter. He was in a hurry, and the store was huge,

and he knew that he could end up wasting a lot of time trying to find it.

So when he spied a woman pushing a cart at a comfortable stroll,

he thought, *She's knows her way around. I'll ask her.*

"Excuse me," he said, "could you direct me to the peanut butter?"

She jerked around, gave him a good hard look and then said, "Are you trying to hit on me?"

Craddock said, "I'm just looking for the peanut butter."

As he backed away from her, he saw a store employee, who directed him to the correct aisle.

After he found what he wanted, Craddock started back toward the checkout counters,

and there he encountered the woman again.

She looked at him and at the jar in his hand and said,

"You *were* looking for the peanut butter!"

Craddock said, "That's what I told you."

The woman replied, "Well, nowadays you can't be too careful."

To which Craddock responded, "Yes you can. Yes, you can."

There are times when it's important to be careful.

Teaching your kids to look both ways before crossing the street.

Checking twice to make sure you're taking the correct dosage of medicine.

Not texting while driving.

In situations like these, *no one* would recommend carelessness.

But when it comes to serving God, and following Jesus,

we are **rarely**, if **EVER**, called to be *careful*.¹

Today, we heard two different stories of what we refer to as *call*, stories which reveal that God calls us to get involved, personally and meaningfully, with God's people.

Isaiah's call occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died."

This historical designation indicates something about the emotional state of God's people.

Uzziah had been anointed king when he was sixteen years old,

and he reigned for fifty-two years.

He was mostly a good king, expanding the country's borders

and building its infrastructure so that it prospered.

It may be hard for us to fathom, since our leaders change every few years by design,

but for a king who had ruled in relative peace and prosperity for **five decades** to die

– that inevitably plunges a country into a time of uncertainty and fear.

So it was then – in the year of chaos and uncertainty –

that Isaiah had this extraordinary vision of God on a throne

filling every corner of the temple with God's robes,

surrounded by heavenly creatures.

The whole scenario leaves Isaiah astonished, humbled, and in physical pain

when one of those creatures touches a burning coal to Isaiah's lips

¹ For this opening, I am indebted to Kristy Farber's sermon "Spend It All," preached at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC, August 23, 2015.

in an act of purification.

And yet, when God asks,

“whom shall I send, who will go for us?”

Isaiah does not hesitate to respond, “Here I am. Send me!”

Then we have the call of the first disciples in Luke.

Some fishermen are going about their work when an itinerant teacher asks

to borrow a boat to get a little distance from the crowd

and amplification of his voice over the water.

Why not, they responded; the fishing wasn't so good that day anyway.

But after he teaches, Jesus tells them to go out in the deep water

and put down their nets.

Skeptical – they are the professionals, after all –

they nevertheless humor Jesus...and end up with a catch bigger

than their nets can hold.

When Simon Peter experiences this miracle he responds, like Isaiah,

with astonishment and humility, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinner!”

But Jesus will have none of it;

instead of pushing Peter away, he invites him to **come closer**,

to trade the messiness of fishing for the messiness of getting involved,

personally and meaningfully, with God's people.

Peter and James and John leave everything behind to follow Jesus.

Drew Dudley is a leadership coach who speaks about the importance of what he calls

“everyday leadership.”

This concept came from an encounter Drew had on his last day of college.

He was walking across campus when another student approached him and said,

“I heard you’re leaving, and before you do I wanted to tell you

I remember the day we met, because meeting you *changed my life.*”

She went on to tell him they met on her first day of college.

The day before, in a hotel room with her parents, she had broken down in tears,

scared and convinced she wasn’t ready.

But her parents told her, “Let’s just go tomorrow for the first day,

and if at any point you feel you really can’t do it,

that’s fine, we’ll take you home.

We love you, no matter what.”

The next day, the young woman was standing in line with her parents,

waiting to register for classes.

She looked around at the other students and this feeling came over her,

she just knew she couldn’t do it, she wasn’t ready.

She turned to tell her parents this, when she saw

Drew Dudley walking out of the student union,

wearing the **stupidest hat** she’d ever seen.

He was carrying a sign promoting a student-run charity and holding a bucket of lollipops.

He walked right up to where she stood and turned to the student

next to her in line, gave him a lollipop and said,

“You need to give a lollipop to this beautiful woman standing next to you.”

The student was so embarrassed that he turned bright red, he couldn’t even look at the woman, but he held out the lollipop to her and she took it,

at which point Drew got a severe look on his face

and said to the woman’s parents, “Look at that.

First day away from home and already she’s taking candy from a stranger.”

Twenty feet in every direction, everyone in line burst out laughing.

In the moment, surrounded by strangers laughing together,

the woman realized, “I can do this.”

And she did.

She registered for her classes, she stayed in school, and she ended up dating

and eventually marrying the young man whom Drew

convinced to give her a lollipop.

And on his last day, she sought out Drew Dudley to tell him.

“Even though you may not have known it,” she said,

“You’ve been an incredibly important person in my life. Thank you.”

When that young woman told Drew he had changed her life years earlier,

he was astonished – and a little ashamed to admit he had **no memory** of the encounter.

Now, in his teaching on everyday leadership, he uses that story

to invite people to think of a “lollipop moment” –

when someone said or did something that fundamentally changed your life for the better,
when the willingness of another person to take a risk and reach out,
to set aside careful and meaningfully engage you,
made all the difference.²

When Jesus tells those fishermen to put their boats in deep water and let down their nets,
he's not referring to the literal depth of the water.

The Greek word translated here as "deep water" evokes an idea

from the Hebrew Bible of a primordial sea,

a symbol of chaos and uncertainty;³

it is the marine equivalent of "the year that King Uzziah died."

"Put your nets in the **deep water**," Jesus says.

Like it or not, God never calls God's people

from chaos to stability, from uncertainty to comfort –

God does not call us to **shallow** waters.

God calls us to the deep water, to enter the chaos,

to confront the fear, and, most importantly,

to encounter God's people along the way.

As Jesus's disciples, we are called to participate in the messiness of a life with God in it,

a life of unconditional love, unilateral forgiveness, and radical hospitality,

² https://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership

³ Ronald J. Allen, Commentary on Luke 5:1-11, WorkingPreacher.com, February 10, 2019.
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3958

not just for our family or friends or neighbor,

but even for strangers, even for those who are different from us,
even for those whose lifestyle choices or politics don't align with ours.

God calls us to **move away** from the ease and comfort of the shallow waters,
to move into the DEEP WATER, where life is confusing, and people are hurting,
and injustice is real and undeniable, and mistakes are made,
conversations are messy, and solutions are complicated.

Jesus calls us to the deep water, because this is where the fish are,
this is where we will encounter God's people who are fragile and vulnerable
and longing to be loved and changed...

and who might just change us as well.

Chances are, you have already been the catalyst for someone's "lollipop moment,"

because each one of us has the capacity to impact another person's life.

We can all be the catalyst for a someone's lollipop moment because God has called us
to be disciples, to get involved, personally and meaningfully, with God's people.

The Bible is filled with call stories,

and what they all have in common is that God chooses **ordinary** people

to do God's **extraordinary** work.

Abram and Sarai, Eli and Esther, David and Solomon, Ruth and Naomi,

Amos and Jonah, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph,

Peter and James and John and Mary and Martha

and the list goes on and on...

right up to each one of us sitting in this sanctuary today.

In his poem "That Sweet Moon Language," the poet Hafez writes:

Admit something:

Everyone you see, you say to them,

"Love me."

Of course you do not do this out loud;

Otherwise, Someone would call the cops.

Still though, think about this,

This great pull in us to connect.

Why not become the one

Who lives with a full moon in each eye

That is always saying

With that sweet moon

Language

What every other eye in this world

Is dying to

Hear.⁴

Our world needs people who are willing to wade into deep water,

To answer the call to share the good news of God's love and forgiveness.

⁴ quoted in Boyle, Gregory, *Tattoos on the Heart* (p. 18). Simon & Schuster, Inc., Kindle Edition.

For Isaiah and for the disciples, this calling was not easy.

People weren't always ready or willing to receive the news they had to share.

The resistance they met was at times overwhelming and heart-breaking.

But they could always return to the story of the moment

they had an undeniable encounter with the living God,

an encounter that inspired them to step out into the unknown,

to leap **before** they looked, to **abandon** CAREFUL

and respond with enthusiasm:

"Here I am. Send me."

"Yes, we will go with you and fish for people!"

Today, whoever you are, whatever church you are part of,

may we remember, and help one another remember,

That as individuals and as churches, God is calling us into the deep water,

God is calling us to abandon careful and follow Jesus,

to discover, **together**, the transformation and joy that comes

when we claim our identity as God's beloved, forgiven children

and reaffirm that identity in each another

and in every single person we meet.

Amen.

© 2022, Amy Starr Redwine