

“Did God Goof?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney

Luke 5:1-11

He lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous. Born into wealth and privilege, he was a notorious party animal. He lived a life of selfish ease. Much to the dismay of his mother, he haunted the low-life dives of the city. He kept company with scandalous characters. He had a son by his live-in girlfriend and made no move to marry her. He was, in short, an embarrassment.

One day, this entitled young man had a change of heart. The young man opened the Bible and read these words: “LET US BEHAVE DECENTLY, AS IN THE DAYTIME, NOT IN CAROUSING AND DRUNKENNESS, NOT IN SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND DEBAUCHERY, NOT IN DISSENSION AND JEALOUSY. RATHER, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND DO NOT THINK ABOUT HOW TO GRATIFY THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH.” *Romans 13:13-14*

Years later, the man wrote about how he felt that day: “Instantly, it was as if the light of peace was poured into my heart, and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.”

Not long after, this self-indulgent young man surprised his friends by training for the priesthood. Ultimately, he became not only a priest, but a bishop.

This very man was none other than Augustine, and he lived in the fourth century. He was as unlikely a candidate for sainthood as any you'll find.

Then there's the prophet Isaiah. We don't know much about his life, but today's lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures hints at the inner turmoil this troubled believer felt.

Isaiah is in the temple. As he stands there, Isaiah has a vision. He sees the Lord himself, enthroned on high, a figure so immense that the hem of his robe touches the temple walls. And Isaiah sees angels — dozens of them, cherubim and seraphim. The walls shake with their voices, and the cavernous hall is filled with smoke.

Isaiah is terrified. He shrinks back into a dark corner, cowering behind a pillar. “WOE IS ME!” he says to himself. “I AM LOST, FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAR LIPS, AND I LIVE AMONG A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAR LIPS; YET MY EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING, THE LORD OF HOSTS!”

One of the seraphim flutters over, holding in a pair of tongs a live coal from the sacrificial fire. The angel touches it to Isaiah’s mouth and tells him his sins have been blotted out.

Then, Isaiah hears the thundering voice of the Lord: “WHOM SHALL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?”

“HERE AM I,” Isaiah cries out, “SEND ME!” *Isaiah 6:1-8*

God has issued some other unlikely calls. Scan the pages of a Bible or a book of church history, and you’ll find stories of men and women who are just as sinful and equally undeserving, and yet whom God calls anyway.

Jesus’ disciples are like that, too. They’re ordinary people, not the movers and shakers, the honored professionals of their world, but blue-collar laborers. None of them has had much in the way of education. None of them has ever been to seminary. Yet, these are the ones Jesus invites to join him on a fishing expedition — fishing for the hearts and souls of people.

Some say there’s an ancient scroll, discovered in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. At the top of the letter — it’s hard to read, because it’s so brittle with age — you can make out the shadow of a letterhead: “Jordan Management Consultants.” It reads as follows:

Dear Jesus, Son of Joseph:

We are pleased to have reviewed the resumes of the 12 men you have picked for management positions in your organization. They have taken our battery of psychological tests, and our vocational counselors have interviewed each one.

It is our staff’s professional opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the enterprise you are

undertaking. They are not team players. We recommend that you continue your search until you find better-qualified candidates.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper.

Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership.

The brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty.

Thomas demonstrates a skeptical, questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

Our investigators have discovered that the Jerusalem Better Business Bureau has an inch-thick file of ethics complaints against Matthew concerning his former employment as a tax collector.

James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus definitely have radical leanings, and both register a low score on tests of psychological stability.

Only one of your candidates shows high potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness. He meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in the highest places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. Therefore, we recommend Judas Iscariot as your chief operating officer.

Wishing you every success in your new venture,

Jordan Management Consultants

You get the point. Had Jesus set out to found a smoothly functioning global nonprofit, he surely could have picked better people.

But Jesus didn't set out to create an organization. He came into the world, like his cousin John, "AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT" *John 1:6*. By the power of the Holy Spirit, those feeble disciples did the most astounding things, amazing even themselves.

They're unlikely disciples, every last one of them. Yet these are the ones God calls. If nothing else, God has a sense of humor!

There's only one requirement for discipleship – a willingness to submit to God's call. You don't have to be smart, strong, healthy, or even particularly religious. All you need to do is listen when God calls, and then get up and do what's needed.

You don't even need to respond immediately. The Bible is full of people like Jonah, who — as soon as they hear God calling — run off in the opposite direction. Yet, one thing you must admit about God's call is that it's persistent. God will stick with it, until finally we cease our resistance and give in.

There's so much in us that would block God's call — as if that were possible. There's so much pride, so much determination to seek glory for ourselves. It's only when we turn ourselves over to God and say, “BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM” *1 Corinthians 15:10*. Only then can we take those first hesitant steps in the direction of our calling.

We're all unlikely candidates for discipleship, every last one of us. Just look around the typical church sanctuary. There are no super Christians — only ordinary people, hesitant in their faith, sometimes wavering in their commitment, oftentimes difficult to live with. As a collective group, we're sinful, hypocritical, stingy, short-tempered, insecure — in short, no different from any other gathering of human beings on this globe. And if God picks us, we can't help but think that God has goofed up royally.

Yet haven't we all — somewhere, sometime — heard something of God's call in our lives? Each time we reach such a vocational crossroads, we have a choice. We can say yes to God's call — however hesitantly — or we can go our own way.

“WHOM SHALL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?” demands the voice of God. Isaiah says, “HERE AM I, SEND ME.”

What say you?