

## **Being Called**

Genesis 12:1-9

Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

June 11, 2023

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

### *Genesis 12:1-9*

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

### *Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26*

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

--

Dolly Parton is an American icon. She is known and recognized whether or not someone is a country music fan. She has this presence, this appearance, that is unmistakable.

For this reason, she sleeps with her makeup on. She wears a full face of makeup to bed, only to wash it off in the morning and immediately start all over again. Why? “Because I never

know if there's going to be an earthquake or a tornado or a storm and I'm going to have to go out in the middle of the night!" Parton's primed face is also perpetually prepared for possible tour bus wrecks, potential hotel fires, and roommates in general," "because being Dolly Parton is a 24/7 job — even in the event of an emergency.

Always being 'The Dolly Parton' keeps her always perfect, no cracks or flaws in the image, no chance an off-duty Dolly Parton will be seen by a middle-of-the-night EMT or paparazzi.

This ideal, this high standard and expectation of herself, is a voluntary choice that she has made. Presenting herself without flaw or failure is her own willing decision and action. For Dolly Parton, it is the right and intentional way. Yet, how many of us hold ourselves to such an incredibly high standard by worry, by fear, by self-doubt? We don't hold this expectation for ourselves in a positive light, but rather from fear of being embarrassed or shamed or rejected for our weaknesses, our inadequacies, our awkward moments, our stumbles, our shadows and our struggles. We can see ourselves as a fraud, as one with imposter syndrome, and hope that others do not see our truest self.

Jesus certainly knew something about rejection and shadows. Beginning his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth<sup>ii</sup>, he had been rejected by the residents who saw him as a fraud—he was a carpenter's son and nothing more. His truth was dismissed and swept away into the shadows. He moved on to Capernaum, and adopted that fishing village as his new hometown.

As his ministry grew he began to call disciples, to call his partners in ministry. Returning back home to Capernaum one day he chose and called one of his earliest disciples. Jesus did not choose someone from the temple or a town leader, or any other highly regarded and respected citizen. He chose Mathew--Matthew who was a tax collector, a truly despised profession, the lowest snake oil salesman. Although they were Jewish themselves, tax collectors were reviled by the Jews because of their sins of greed and traitorous collaboration with the Roman occupiers. Tax collectors were not actually paid a wage by the Romans as they were expected to take extra money and keep some for themselves, but there were no regulations and controls on that practice. A tax collector would really be just a dressed-up thief.

"Follow me." And Matthew simply got up and immediately followed Jesus. Was Matthew tired of this lifestyle and wanted something better for his life but had been too weak to find a way out? Had he struggled with guilt about his greed that left him embarrassed and ashamed? Had he been hiding behind a façade of feeling flawless? When he was chosen, invited, welcomed, called to Jesus, he said 'yes' to the high standards, expectations and grace that were offered to him. He saw Jesus as the physician healing his sickness with mercy and forgiveness.

For Matthew to get up and follow Jesus was a sign of trust and faith in this man he had heard about. It was to walk away from the stacks of money and goods on his table, the powerful authority he had. It was to leave this behind and never look back, no matter what the future with Jesus would hold. He left certainty for uncertainty, wealth for wandering and worship and wonder.

God never calls us *to* something, without first calling us *away* from something. And that truth is as old as Abraham and Sarah, the first people unexpectedly chosen and called by God to something way beyond any wildest dream or imagining. They were called from a childless yet comfortable and content lifestyle to become the parents of the nation of Israel, to be the faith ancestors of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so

that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” To say ‘yes’ to God, they had to leave home and trust God for their future, come what may.

Matthew the unscrupulous tax collector became a disciple and a Gospel writer. Barren Abraham and Sarah became the faith parents of generations. It is not so much what God sees in us that makes us worthy, but rather what God puts in us when we put our own way down to say ‘yes,’ when Jesus says, “follow me.” Grace changes people, grace changes lives.

Sometimes God calls when life is seemingly going well, when we have no idea God has a greater vision for us. Sometimes God calls when life is hard and sad and painful.

Jairus, a faithful leader of the synagogue grieved at Jesus’ feet as he learned that his young daughter had just died and he sought Jesus’ healing touch for her. A woman ostracized for 12 years because of the ritual impurity of chronic hemorrhaging dared to reach out for compassionate healing. The girl and the woman were healed. God called both of them away from illness, from emptiness, to new life. God seeks us out in our tender, fragile, vulnerable moments, when we cannot rely on just our own abilities, strengths and experience. God calls when we can be open to hearing, seeing, touching the grace that changes people, changes lives.

God chose a childless couple. Jesus invited an immoral man to follow him. Jesus touched a dead girl and he was embraced by someone seen as untouchable. God's perfection is shown most fully not in flaws noted and shut out or scores kept and settled, but in the extravagant embrace of flawed, hurting, willing people.<sup>iii</sup>

God’s call on us is not seeking us to be perfect, without cracks or flaws in our image, but in who we truly are, with the crow’s feet of our fears and our worries, with the lines of our weaknesses and our inadequacies, with all the wrinkles of our stumbles, shadows and struggles, with all the blemishes of our scars, pains and wounds.

As Jesus was walking along, he said, “Follow me.” Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.thecut.com/2021/06/dolly-parton-beauty-routine.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 4: 16-30

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/05/proper\\_5\\_year\\_a.html](https://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/05/proper_5_year_a.html)