



January 22, 2006

Preaching: Rev. Eunbae Doh

Mark 1:14-20

“Can you Follow Him?”

Good morning, Church!

The robe I am wearing has special meaning to me. It was my father’s robe, who finished his ministry of 50 years last year. When I left Korea to study in the United States, I gave my robe and stole to my friend. At that time I thought I would never work in the United States. My only concern was to finish my studying as quickly as possible and go back to Korea.

But God led me to work here. I had to get a new robe and stole. I was going to buy a new one. But I changed my mind. I was inspired by the story of the Prophet Elijah and his successor Elisha. When God took Elijah up to heaven, Elisha gained a double share of his master’s spiritual power by getting the mantle of his master Elijah. I made a call to my father in Korea and said “Father, could you help me? It seemed like he was uncomfortable. Because when most sons call to ask for something, it means money. But I didn’t follow the pattern. I said, “Could you send me your robe and stole?” He said, “Oh, son, why are you asking me? They are too old. It would be better to buy a new one.” I said, I know, father, but it’s exactly what I want. Do you know why I’m asking you for such an old and worn robe? I want to inherit your spiritual power by getting the robe as Elisha did.” I want to start my ministry with your spiritual inheritance. It will be the best gift ever you can give me.”

The reason I’m telling you this story of my robe is to say that we can take over everything from parents, teacher, and master, but nobody can take over another’s calling. A calling is coming only from God, not from any human. Even though you take over money, house, car, even robe and stole, you can not take over your parents’ calling. You need to answer the calling from God yourself. You have to make a decision to follow God.

Today's Bible tells us a wonderful story about calling. Jesus was calling his first disciples. They were fishing. When Jesus called them, they followed him. The point of this story is the fact they followed Jesus **immediately, instantly**.

How could they follow Jesus without any hesitation? I'm not trying to say to you whenever someone calls you; you need to follow him or her. It is impossible.

I want to focus on a question. Why did Jesus call the fishermen and not others? I believe that there are many people and groups who could have been his disciple and were quite competent in Jewish society. There were several prominent groups in the society. There is a group of the Pharisees who had deep knowledge of Law and piety. And the group called the Sadducees who had money and power. The other was the Zealots, who loved their nation and tried to gain independence from the Roman Empire with passion and patriotic ardor. Frankly, they were more competent and qualified groups than the fishermen.

But why did Jesus choose fishermen as his first disciples? Here is the answer. The characteristics and strengths which those groups had, the Law, piety, and tradition of the Pharisees; money and power of the Sadducees; and passion, patriotism and activism of the Zealots, were obstacles to following Jesus.

Let's think about these obstacles.

First, the knowledge, Law and tradition of the Pharisees. The Bible is describing these people as hypocritical figures. But, at least in that time, they were highly respected people. They were eager in studying and knowing the meaning of the Law and in preserving their tradition. They understood their calling to keep their spiritual identity as a chosen people.

But Jesus didn't call them because they *were* the people of Law and tradition. They had a narrow mind and exclusive attitude toward anything beyond their knowledge and tradition. They were not a people capable of accepting something new, namely new teaching, life style, and cultural, religious diversity and difference.

Unfortunately, many people who attend their church for a long time tend to be exclusive to something unfamiliar. The more they go to church, the more they become exclusive. They can't leave something they have been keeping and doing. They are in fear of change and transition.

The first disciples were free from any tradition and knowledge of the past, because they were the people of the present, pursuing daily bread on the Sea of Galilee without any guarantee of the future.

How about you? Are you open enough to listen to Jesus' voice, to respond his calling, and to accept new challenges? Can you give up everything which you are familiar with to follow Jesus?

When I served a Korean congregation in Toledo, I was used to move forward and backward, left and right, as I preached. Believe it or not, I was a power preacher free from sermon note. But here, I can't do that anymore because of my restriction of English. One day, after worship service, a man, one of the members of the church came to me and said, "Would you stop moving around? That really bothers me" I believe a preacher should not move. I have never seen that before. I was a little upset and said, "How can I stop it? Don't you know the words of the Bible say, **"The wind blows where it chooses, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."**(John 3:9) "I can't make myself stop because I don't know where I move." Well, frankly, I didn't say that, I couldn't, but I really wanted to.

Secondly, the political and economical power of the Sadducee. They were the power group in that society. They maintained and raised their power and riches by having a close relationship with the High Priest and Roman government. If Jesus had a close relationship with the Sadducees, He wouldn't have needed to make an effort to work the miracle to feed 5000 people. They could have paid for fish dinners for everyone at the feeding of the 5000. But it is clear that Jesus didn't call the Sadducees as his disciple.

This is the passage from the Gospel.

The young man said to him, I have kept all these; what do I still lack? Jesus said to him if you wish to be perfect, go, sell, your possession, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me. When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Matthew 19:20-23)

I don't want to give you an explanation about this story. And I don't want to give any lesson on how our property and money prevent us from following Jesus, because we have already experienced a lot in our daily life.

Just listen what the wise man said.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need. (Proverbs 30:8)

Are there any better ideas or teachings than this?

Third, the passion of Zealot. They were resistant against the Roman Empire to get their sovereignty and freedom. It is well known that one of the disciples of Jesus may have been involved with the group. They would hate the piety of the Pharisees who didn't take any political action for their nation and the Sadducee who had a deep relationship with their enemy.

Extreme activism and passion can be the main factor to judge others. Sometimes they go before God and justify and sacrifice everything for their own goal and purpose. Finally, they destroy their community and themselves.

Sometimes human passion and will can be an obstacle to responding to and following a call from God. Because for the people of action and passion, it is very hard to discern between human desire and God's will.

We have heard many lessons and word from TV or books telling how can you make your life better; the secret of a successful life; you can do anything; believe in yourself, your power, your possibility. Just do it.

I want to share with you my personal story. Five month ago, I was waiting for a call from a district superintendent of our denomination. One day I got a call I was waiting for and heard our denomination is going to send me to an American congregation. I was surprised and scared. I had not had any experience of cross cultural ministry.

I prayed to God, "God, I can't do that. I am not the right person. You know who I am. I can't speak English well. Are you killing me? I will be in trouble. Suddenly, God whispered a voice in my mind.

The kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. (1 Corinthians 4:20)

I realized. Yes, Lord. I can't, but I **can**. I can't speak the language fluently, but ministry is not a matter of language. God, I can't do anything without you. But if you give me your power and if you are with me, I can. I will not fear anything wherever I go.

When you realize your weakness and limitations and confess you can't do anything without God, that will be the time God calls you.

Are you ready to follow Jesus and to listen to his voice?

When you depart from familiar things in your life and make your heart open to new things,

When you make your soul set free from your money and riches,

When you put your self-confidence down under the cross Jesus died on, you will hear the voice Jesus calling you like the first disciples in the Sea of Galilee.