

Called by Jesus: the only qualification needed is openness to Jesus

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Reading: Matthew 4:12-25

Applying for a job is always a stressful time. There's massaging your CV. Then there's getting the referees and making sure they will say nice things about you. Then there's the worst part, the interview. I had several holiday jobs, but my first real interview was for a job at the Housing Corp. I was young. When they asked me why I wanted the job I said, "Because it's better than being on the dole." I saw him write "Honest" on the form. They gave me the job.

As far as job interviews go this one's a mystery. The job description is really sketchy, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." What does that even mean? There are no business premises, no kiwi-saver scheme and no obvious business plan. The uncertainties and dangers of fishing look good in comparison.

To be fair the applicants don't have much going for them either. Two sets of brothers: Peter and Andrew, James and John. We know that Peter is to turn out flaky and John is slow to get it, Andrew is always a follower never a leader while James constantly misses the point.

But God seems to call those whom the world would be quick to dismiss; Moses was a murderer, Miriam was a gossip, Abraham was too old, and Jeremiah was too young and had depression. David couldn't keep his loin cloth on. Mary, Jesus' mother, was too young and Mary of Bethany was lazy. Noah got drunk and Elijah was burnt out while Martha had a need to be needed.

But alongside these first dodgy disciples Jesus calls is the dodgy place they come from. Jesus has taken himself off to Galilee, possibly because he feared being arrested like John. He bases himself at Capernaum on the shore of Lake Galilee. Politely called Galilee of the Gentiles, Matthew is at pains to point out

that this is a place of mixed race. We might call it Loserville. The movers and the shakers are in Rome. The local heavyweights are in Jerusalem. Nobody of any note comes out of Galilee. And yet Jesus calls in that place.

This magnetic Rabbi from whom mercy and love seem to flow, he calls. His claim on the first disciples is more powerful than family, finance and, frankly, common sense.

So, what was it that Jesus saw in these people?

I want to suggest they had just one single quality. And this single quality marks them out. It is the one qualification that all the CV's and referees and job interviews will never find and its essential in you and in me.

They are open. They are open to Jesus. These fishermen, for all their downsides, had a radical openness to Jesus call. All the gospels record it the same way.

Verse 20: "At once they followed him..." Verse 22 "Immediately they followed him..." This is radical openness.

History is full of people who have responded with this sort of openness.

Tony was just minding his own business. He didn't think of himself as especially talented, he certainly never thought of himself as a public speaker. Obviously, the monastery that he lived didn't think he was especially gifted either. They had given him the job of keeping the kitchen, washing the dishes and peeling the potatoes. But all that was to change very quickly. The day it did everyone was going to the local church to join in the ordination of a priest. It was an exciting event, and Tony was looking forward to it. He was saying his prayers just before the service was about to start and the Abbott tapped him on the shoulder. "Bit of problem brother, the preacher hasn't shown up. Rumour is he's sick. I'd be grateful if you would step up." Tony didn't get it at first. "What do you mean step up." "Preach the sermon brother. I would be ever so grateful." Brother Tony gave a brilliant sermon that day. And he went on to be one of the greatest preachers of his day. In twelfth century Italy, thousands

would come to hear him all over the country and beyond. Today we know him as St Anthony of Padua.

But what of us? We can think of a million reasons not to be open to God's call on our lives. "I'm too busy, I'm not gifted, I'm too old, I'm too young, I'm too sick, I'm too ..." You can fill in the dots, yet when we look into our hearts that same call is there. That same call that drove the first disciples all those years ago. That same magnetic Jesus, that same compelling love is still calling us.

Joy Cowley, a New Zealand poet puts it like this:

Jesus said come follow me.

I say Lord you're calling the wrong person. I'm not the following type. It takes me all my time to stand on my own two feet.

And Jesus answers I love you.

I say now don't get me wrong Lord; I do all I can within reason, but I can't afford to go overboard. I mean I have to live in this world.

And Jesus answers I love you.

I say it's all very well to talk about love, but love is dangerous. It can get people crucified. At the best it can be misunderstood. If I go around telling people I love them, they will lock me up.

And Jesus answers I love you.

I say the trouble is I'm not ready. Come back in a few years when I've got my life sorted out. By then I should have something to offer you.

And Jesus answers I love you.

I say Lord don't look at me like that. You're making it very difficult. All right, I'll spell it out. I'm a sinner. I'd let you down. I'd give my life to you and then try and take it back again. I'm weak.

And Jesus answers I love you.

I say you don't understand what I'm telling you. I'd deny you and betray you. There'd be times when I'd crucify you and what would you think of me then.

And Jesus answers I love you.