

A call to change careers (Matthew 4:12-23)

There was certainly nothing wrong with doing what I did before.

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I'm a second-career pastor. That means I used to do something else for a living. I did it fairly well, but not with a great deal of zeal or enthusiasm. It was a service I provided for others, who often had no sense of the scope of what was required to bring that service to them. More cynically, it was a paycheck, the assurance that I wouldn't be evicted from my apartment.

There was certainly nothing wrong with doing what I did. Many would consider it honorable. From youth, many of us are advised to go to school and get an education so that we can get a good job. It's advice I followed; I did it "right." But apparently doing it right wasn't what God wanted, because somehow I ended up in seminary.

What in the world might Simon have to say about Jesus changing Simon's job, even his name? Jesus does this on the heels of a major shift. John the Baptist has been arrested. The hegemony has begun to bear down on the preachers who herald that God's kingdom has come near. The privileged class feels threatened--even though they are being invited to participate in something greater. Things are changing.

Jesus responds with a sense of urgency. He needs to speak even more boldly of the nearness of God's reign. And he needs to enlist some workers in what will prove to be arduous and serious work. Simon and Andrew's assignments have to change because the culture--indeed, the world--has changed.

God's call often seems to be directly related to some major shift that requires a strong witness. Some of us were called into ministry from work that was already important. We were making a visible difference and providing an important service. Yet God needed us to do something different, because something had changed-- whether or not we were able to perceive that change.

I believe this is Christ's continuing call to the church. We may find ourselves going about life just fine, doing work that feeds and serves people, yet God will call us to do and be something different. How willing are we to submit to that shift in our assignment? If the church was previously known for building hospitals and schools, how will it respond to the growing need to serve refugee families or to be a force in the fight against bigotry? Will we accept the changing needs around us and submit to a new assignment, or will we hold fast to what we've always known?

As Jesus reveals who he is to us, how disruptive will we find that revelation? And are we prepared to welcome that disruption?