

Every hero's journey begins with a call. That was true for Moses and Moana, for Luke Skywalker and for Jesus, and it's true for each one of us as well. To be loved by God is to have a calling placed upon our lives. Calling is not reserved for pastors or those in the helping professions. Everyone is called, whether they know it or not. We all have a vocation, regardless of our employment. Jobs come and go, but your vocation remains. The word "vocation" comes from the Latin, "vocare" which means to call. We are talking about something far deeper and more significant than a career. What is your calling? Discovering your calling and following it is one of the most courageous things we can ever do.

Moana is one of my all-time favorite films. It is a story of discovering and following one's call. The story has been told thousands and thousands of times in different forms. Moana is the daughter of the village chief on a small Pacific Island, and everyone is looking to her to be their next leader. While she loves her people, she feels called by the sea to voyage. But no one in her tribe is allowed to go beyond the reef, because they have everything they need for happiness right where they are—or at least that's what they are told. While Moana wants to honor her father and her people, she cannot ignore the call of the sea she hears in her heart. When disease breaks out in the island vegetation, and when her grandmother dies, Moana answers the call of the sea to find hope for her people.

Jesus' calling was made clear at his baptism, that he is God's beloved Son in whom God is well-pleased. Embedded within those words are not just blessing but calling. To be named God's beloved Son in this context is a reference to the Davidic line of kings. It's not just that God loves Jesus, but God is naming Jesus as the royal son, heir to the throne of Israel. In his baptism, Jesus is publicly anointed as Israel's true king. That of course is dangerous because Israel already has a king, Herod Antipas. Just like his father, Herod the Great, little Herod Antipas isn't too keen on having rivals. That's where our story today begins, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali." Hearing the news that John has been arrested, Jesus gets out of Dodge. If John is in danger, then so is Jesus. Both pose a threat to those in power. When John invites people to receive forgiveness through baptism in the wilderness, he becomes a threat. There's an entire system set up for how one receives forgiveness, and that system involves priests and the Temple in Jerusalem, which also happened to be the economic engine of the entire city. John comes along, acting entirely outside that system, pouring out forgiveness like it's river water, and the people in charge don't like it. Of course, they don't! Herod's thugs arrest John hoping to put his movement to an end, but little do they know that one greater than John has come, and he is just getting started.

Jesus begins his vocation by withdrawing to Galilee, to build his movement out of the view of the Empire. The time for confrontation will come, but first he will build his band of merry resisters, saying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**" These are the exact same words John the Baptist used. When we hear the word "repent" we think about morally shaping up. But repentance is so much more than that. The word literally means to change your mind. Repentance is not about self-loathing. The call is to change your mind, to see the world anew, to let go of your normal loyalties as set by the kingdom of Herod and Rome, and to instead allow God's kingdom to determine your loyalties. It's incredible to think how little Jesus says about the afterlife and how much he has to say about the kingdom of God, or as he puts it in Matthew the kingdom of heaven. It's pretty much the only thing he talks about.

In our world of democracies with leaders elected by the will of the people, it can be hard to relate to the word “kingdom.” For us it denotes hierarchies and power, yet the kingdom Jesus describes is ruled by grace and forgiveness. This is why many Biblical scholars have removed the “g” from the word, instead calling it the kindom of God. The kingdom Jesus is calling you to join is one in which you recognize and honor your kinship with all creation. God’s kindom includes all nations, tribes, and families, which means your loyalty is no longer merely to your nation, your tribe, or your family. To follow Jesus means you are part of God’s universal family, a world in which everyone belongs, and all are welcomed. And that sounds great until we realize what it means. Jesus doesn’t call us to follow him in our spare time or on Sundays. He calls us to follow him with our whole life and be willing to leave it all behind.

Jesus walks along the shoreline and sees two brothers, Peter and Andrew, who were busy fishing, making a living, minding their own business, until Jesus comes along and wrecks their world: **“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”** Incredible, isn’t it? They leave their jobs and discover their vocation. They don’t weigh their options and sell their share of the company. They leave the life they knew and followed. This isn’t the last time Jesus will call someone to let go of their attachment to wealth and occupation, and all of these stories make me uncomfortable. I want to follow Jesus, while still holding onto my career, my possessions, and my retirement account. But following Jesus means letting go of our attachments to career and financial security, and if that weren’t hard enough, he even calls us to leave our families.

Jesus calls James and John who not only leave their career as fishermen. They leave their father as well. Matthew tells us, **“Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.”** Amazing. Are there bigger attachments that any of us have than wealth and family? Jesus goes right to the heart of what we value most, our two biggest sources of security and identity, and he says if you want to find true life, then you need to let those things go. Of course, career and family are wonderful gifts from God. I cherish mine, and I suspect many of you do too. I don’t think Jesus is literally calling us all to leave our jobs and families, but I think he wants us to know that there are more important things in life than making money and pleasing our parents and thank God for that.

Have you noticed that in every hero’s story, for the hero to grow up and discover their vocation, they must leave the village behind, and enter a larger world? Bilbo leaves the Shire. Luke leaves Tatooine. Moana leaves her father and her village behind and voyages across the sea. Jesus leaves home and invites us to join him on an adventure that will take all the courage we have. We will face dragons, temptations, contempt from our tribes, and even a cross, but if we stay true to the call, we will find freedom and healing for both our own soul and for our village back home. That’s the promise of the kindom, healing for everyone.

While most of us will not and should not literally leave our families or irresponsibly quit our jobs, if we are unable to think beyond the small vision of our attachments, then we will remain perpetually immature. If we are unable to see beyond the limited vision of our small tribe, then we will remain narcissistic, codependent children. The call of the kingdom is a call to grow up, to not only be concerned with your family, but with all families. It’s to see that that your security and your neighbor’s security, and the security of the people in Linden, and San Francisco, and the Ukraine and Afghanistan are ultimately one and the same. But to see that, you must leave home. Then and only then will we witness the kindom of heaven transform our

lives and our communities: **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”** That’s the promise. This is not merely an account of what happened way back when. It’s a promise of what God will do in our midst when we are transformed by Christ’s call.

Christ calls you to the kingdom, and following that call is never safe. In fact, it’s full of danger. But the greater danger is not answering the call, of ignoring what you are here to do. There’s only one of you that God has ever made. You are a unique and unrepeatable utterance of God created for the holy work of love and healing. That’s what you are here to do—to love and heal, to do for others what Christ has done for you. Let’s follow.