

**Living the Easter Life:
CALL**

**Isaiah 6:1-8
Matthew 4:18-22**

Jesus is Lord over our life's calling.

A sermon preached by
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On Saturday, November 5th, 2011, University of Tennessee freshman Derrick Brodus was lying on the couch at his fraternity on Saturday night, waiting for the Tennessee Volunteers college football game to start at 7 P.M. Less than an hour before kickoff, Derrick's cell phone began to ring. To his great surprise, the voice on the other end told him the Tennessee coach was sending a police escort to get him to the stadium immediately.

"I thought it was a dream," Derrick said. "I was just lying on my couch relaxing, and I answer my phone, and they just tell me that I need to come to the stadium as soon as possible."

Just minutes before that call, the Tennessee backup kicker pulled a muscle during pregame warm-ups. The starting kicker was already out, injured in practice. One hour before kickoff, and the Volunteers were out of kickers.

Derrick, a freshman, had tried out as a walk-on placekicker when he enrolled at Tennessee, but he didn't make the team. Nevertheless, on that Saturday Derrick emerged as the Vols' only option.

Tennessee coach Derek Dooley told the press, "I said, 'Let's get an APB out on Brodus. Get him. Just get him here. Give him a Breathalyzer.' It's a good thing he wasn't drunk."

Minutes after Derrick hung up his phone, the police escort arrived at the fraternity to rush him to the stadium. The team's trainer stretched him in the locker room while he put on his pads and a jersey that didn't even have his name on the back.

Early in the game, Derrick was called into duty, and he quickly made the most of his opportunity. Derrick made all three of his extra points, and he kicked a 21-yard field goal at the end of the first half. Tennessee won 24-0.

Back in the locker room after the final whistle, the kicker who began the evening lying on the couch with a bag of chips was celebrated as the hero. The team cheered as Coach Dooley gave Derrick the game ball.¹

Many of us may have fantasies along that line—getting called off the bench or even out of the stands to save the game—but very few of us will ever be so called. There is a much greater probability that you will be called to what we are talking about this morning. In fact, I believe that it is a possibility for every person here this morning to experience the call of God to live the Easter life. You can know the power of the resurrection. You can encounter the risen Christ on your journey of faith. Now that is a call you want to answer!

Throughout Scripture, God calls people to do certain things. Some of those calls are dramatic. Isaiah was a prophet in the royal court in Jerusalem, and he knew his way around the Temple. But all that did not prepare him for the day he saw the Lord. Just the hem of God's robe filled the temple. There were angels flying around, singing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! Heaven and earth are full of his glory!" The sound shook the Temple to its foundations, and smoke filled the air. Then Isaiah heard God say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He stood up and said, "Here I am; send me!"² That dramatic call propelled Isaiah into a lifetime of service.

Contrast Isaiah's encounter with Jesus calling the first disciples. Jesus was walking by the lakeshore, and the fishermen were mending their nets. He walked up to Simon Peter and Andrew and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." They dropped what they were doing and went. A little further down the lakeshore, Jesus did the same thing with James and John. They left poor old Zebedee in the boat by himself, and they followed Jesus.

Scholars debate whether Jesus already had a teaching relationship with these four fisherman. Whether or not he did, I think this moment that had life-changing implications for his disciples was remarkable in its simplicity.

My calling into ministry was more like Jesus by the sea and less like Isaiah. There was no vision of angels or smoke-filled Temple or booming voice. It was more of a gradual process. I felt a gentle tug on my heart to serve the church. I talked to some pastor friends I

knew. I tested the waters with a summer internship. God kept tugging on the string and leading me forward. Finally I came to the realization that pastoral ministry was why God put me on the planet. And I followed his call. For 40 years I have been following the call. Except for a few bad days every once in a while, I have never doubted God's direction in my life.

There are lots of different callings. But I think they all have three things in common. First of all, they are common. **Everybody has one.** Like last week, when we talked about every Christian being given spiritual gifts, I also believe that every Christian has a calling, a purpose in life, a meaningful way to live out our existence. That's what we mean by living the Easter life. We let Jesus be Lord over our life's calling.

Some people are called to ordained ministry, but most are not. I remember Bishop Dick Wilke talking about hearing a preacher at a church camp in Kansas when he was a teenager. The preacher was talking about the North Star and how you can orient your whole world around that star. And Wilke decided that night that Jesus would be his North Star, and he has served Christ and his church to this day. Maybe some of our young people today will hear that call from God in their lives.

But you can follow your North Star in many ways. We believe in the "priesthood of all believers," meaning every disciple of Jesus has a ministry to fulfill. Maybe your ministry is being a teacher or a doctor or a lawyer or a carpenter or a salesperson. Maybe your vocation is your calling; it has the same root word, after all. It is sweet when that happens.

Or maybe your calling has nothing to do with your job. You have to work to pay the bills, or you are retired. Your calling may not be your job. If you have kids or grandkids you care for, certainly being a good parent or grandparent is a calling—an important one! Or your calling could be serving in some capacity—a ministry in the church, a community service organization, going on mission trips. There are all

kinds of ways to find and fulfill your calling. It's whatever fulfills your purpose in God, whatever gives meaning to your life, whatever fills your life with the joy and power of the resurrection, whatever utilizes your spiritual gifts. You get to figure out what your calling is; others can help you discern the call, but ultimately it's your call.

The second thing all callings have in common is that **they do not make life easier**. You might think that they would. It's a call from God. God will surely help us. That sounds like the easy road into heaven, right? But it doesn't work that way. In fact, following the call of God often complicates your life. It can bring conflict. It's a challenge; otherwise you wouldn't need God's help. It might even create hardship.

We tend to want an "Easy button" for our lives. We press the easy button, and everything works out fine and dandy. Maybe that will work for office supplies, but it doesn't work for the life of faith. Think of the people in Scripture that God called. Did any of them have an easy life? Abraham was called to leave his home and travel to an unknown land. Moses was called to liberate his people from slavery and spent 40 years in the desert. David was called to unite a kingdom under his leadership. Jeremiah brought a message of hope to a devastated nation and was imprisoned for it. Paul suffered beatings, imprisonment, and ultimately death for the cause of Christ.

Think about Christian history—Martin Luther—condemned by the church, John Wesley—starting the Methodist movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.—martyr for civil rights, Mother Teresa—caring for the destitute and dying. Following the call does not give you an easy button in life.

So why do it? Why subject yourself to the rigors of real discipleship? Gratitude for what God has done for you, spiritual peace, strength from a divine source, assurance that your life means something, confidence that you are walking the path God chose for you, satisfaction that at the end you will have made a difference, and

in the end eternal life with Jesus in heaven—there are a few good reasons.

The final thing I think all callings have in common is that **they evolve**. Salvation is a process, and life is a journey, and what you think God wants from you now may not be the same thing 5 years or 10 years down the road. As you pursue discipleship, as you utilize your spiritual gifts to serve God and others, opportunities come up that lead your life in a new direction. Life is an ever-evolving path. As Yogi Berra said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”

I thought of that process this week as I sat in the audience and listened to the recognition of seniors who were graduating from the band program at Southside High School. They announced each one, which college they were attending, what their major was going to be. How great it is to know where you’re going and what you’re going to do. But those of us who have lived a little longer know that half of those kids will change schools or change majors and end up somewhere completely different than they ever anticipate at this moment in their lives. And that’s not a bad thing. It just means our life evolves.

And so does our faith. Our confirmation class is making a huge step in faith today, and we are proud of them. But they have no idea where this Christian journey will lead them. They have not really heard any calling except to be Christians on purpose. The rest will evolve as they mature in faith. Our job is to love and support them as they take these early steps of discovery and begin to understand what it means to live the Easter life. Because each of them has a calling, and each of them is an instrument of God.

Simon Birch is a movie about a 12-year-old boy who suffered several deficiencies. He was handicapped from birth and had health problems all his life. He was also small—extra, extra small—and the other children constantly teased him. His voice was squeaky, but he was not afraid to use it to question authority. You see, Simon Birch had an unwavering belief that he was God’s instrument. He felt that

God had a plan for his life, and that before he died, he was going to be a hero. Only his best friend Joe seemed to believe in him.

One Christmas, Simon got in trouble during the rehearsal of the Christmas pageant, and he was sent to the priest's office, still wrapped in swaddling clothes, because he was the only kid small enough to fit into the manger. After discussing his discipline, the priest says, "Is there any question?"

Simon asks, "Does God have a plan for us?"

The priest answers, "I like to think he does."

Simon enthusiastically says, "Me, too. I think God made me the way I am for a reason."

The priest states very coolly, "I'm glad that, um, your faith, uh, helps you deal with, um, you know, your condition."

"That's not what I mean," Simon replies. "I think I'm God's instrument. He's going to use me to carry out his plan."

The priest looks at the small, disfigured little boy and says, "It's wonderful to have faith, son, but let's not overdo it."

As Simon turns dejectedly and leaves the room, the priest shakes his head and whispers cynically, "God's instrument."

Simon Birch does prove to be a hero for God. Right after Christmas he is riding on the church bus with a group of younger children when the driver swerves to miss a deer. The road is icy, and the bus plunges over an embankment into a freezing, rushing river. The bus driver bails out, and the priest is knocked unconscious, so Simon takes charge. Through his leadership, everyone on the bus is saved. Simon himself is the last one out of the sinking bus, wiggling out underwater through an open window.

But the freezing water and the exertion prove too much for Simon's frail system, and with his best friend Joe by his side, he dies in the hospital bed. But he dies knowing that all the children were safe and that God had indeed used him in a powerful way.

Twenty years later, standing by Simon's grave, a grown-up Joe makes this comment: "I am doomed to remember a boy with a

wrecked voice, not because of his voice or because he was the smallest person I ever met...but because he is the reason I believe in God. What faith I have, I owe to Simon Birch...it is Simon who made me a believer.”³

Everyone has a calling. Your calling does not make life easy, and it may change over time. But there is no better journey to be on, no better path to take. Then you will die knowing that you made a contribution; you made a difference; and the world is a better place because you were here. This is living the Easter life.

Richard Halverson was the pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, for many years and also served as the chaplain of the United States Senate. He had a benediction that he used at the end of every service in his ministry. Today let this be our blessing, our word of assurance, our challenge, and our call:

Wherever you go, God is sending you.

Wherever you are, God has put you there.

God has a purpose in your being right where you are.

Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Spirit, wants to do something in and through you.

Believe this and go in his grace, his love, his power.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.⁴

¹ Graham Watson, "Tennessee grabs last-second kicker off his frat house couch," Yahoo Sports (11-8-11).

² Isaiah 6:1-8.

³ *Simon Birch*, suggested by the book *A Prayer For Owen Meany* by John Irving, written and directed by Mark Steven Johnson, produced by Hollywood Pictures, 1998.

⁴ Leighton Ford, Raleigh, North Carolina, *PreachingToday.com*.