

Today's gospel reading speaks to the call of Jesus in our lives. First, we're given the example of Peter and Andrew responding and then James and John. They immediately left everything behind and followed Jesus.

Why? What could have inspired them to make such a drastic change to leave everything behind to follow Jesus without hesitation?

I think part of the reason rests in the words of the beloved Christmas hymn, O Holy Night: "Till he appeared, and the soul felt its worth." When Jesus comes into our lives, when we respond to the call and allow Jesus to lead us forward, our soul feels its worth.

Let's look at what following Jesus meant for Peter, Andrew, James, John, and the other apostles. They had the opportunity to observe Jesus and work along side of him. They reflected together, prayed together, and became friends. As they entered into relationship, they slowly began to change because the radical love they experienced from Jesus helped them begin to see others in a different way as well.

In the midst of the dysfunction that has plagued our world since the beginning of time, God hasn't given up on us. But rather, God sent Jesus to give us vision, to give us the faith, the hope, the love, and the courage to make our world become everything God had hoped it would be.

So Jesus came to liberate us from ourselves. Jesus came to show us that we are loved, that we are all equal, saint and sinner. Jesus taught us that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Therein lies the key to God's plan to transform our world.

For us, it begins with having self-respect. It begins by each one of us learning to love ourselves and to honor that God given dignity that each of us is endowed with. Rather than beating ourselves up for the mistakes we've made, we need to embrace our weaknesses and our flaws, along with our beauty and strength. We need to understand that we are precious just as we are, but we are also challenged to do more. We are challenged

to move beyond ourselves to the world around us. Life, as the saying goes is God's gift to us, what we do with our lives is our gift to God.

Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James and John, and all who would follow after, including us, to experience God's overwhelming love, to let each soul feel it's worth. In the person of Jesus, God's love was made manifest in a real and tangible way. Jesus came to change the world, to invite all people to join together to build God's kingdom here on earth.

Jesus showed us that love is possible, that love can conquer evil. Jesus taught his followers to respect every human person and creature who crossed their paths. No life is dispensable or without value and worth. Jesus taught us that every person was a beloved child of God and was thus their neighbor.

Jesus led by example. He gave us the tools so that we could learn to think and act upon our faith rather than to lazily adhering to the letter of the law or being spoon-fed a watered-down faith. Jesus wants his followers to learn to discern how-to live-in God's kingdom by loving even enemies, by forgiving and letting go of grudges, and by bringing in from the edges all those who are excluded by society or marginalized. Jesus taught Peter, Andrew, James, John and us, that our faith should transform us so that we can truly live the freedom that God's love offers us. Jesus calls us so that we can let our soul feel its worth. We are called to reach out and draw others into that love so that they too can let their souls feel their worth.

For those of us here in this church, we have been called by God to receive the Bread of Life from this altar and then to leave this church building on a mission. We are to leave here as those who are sent, sent along with the original twelve, to change the world by first changing our own lives. We can do this one person at a time, beginning with ourselves.

My friends, I encourage you to ponder this week how we respond to the call of Jesus in our own lives. Are we willing to leave our ordinary routine, to move beyond our comfort zone or other self-imposed limitations to answer the call of Jesus in our lives? Can I hear an Amen?