

Message: Jesus call fulfills us

Have you found your calling in life?¹

“One of the greatest gifts Keri Kent’s parents gave her was permission to listen to the voice of her own gladness. Keri’s father told her that she could do anything with her life; his only hope was that she would enjoy her work as much as he enjoyed his.

Keri’s father was not called to be a missionary or a pastor, a teacher or some other vocation that people label as noble. He ran a small company that sold sandblasting and spray-painting equipment. But he ran it well, and ethically. He demanded hard work from his employees, but never asked them to do more than he was willing to do as well. In *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, Frederick Buechner writes: ‘The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.’

Keri believes Christians have two callings. The first we must heed is the call to follow Jesus. Romans 1:5-6 says, ‘...we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ’ (NRSV). We share that with all our brothers and sisters in Christ; it is a general calling. But each of us also has a specific calling, whether it is to run a company or write books or to be a mom, or an orthodontist, or whatever.

Romans 1:1 says that Paul was “called to be an apostle.” That was his specific calling. The voice of Keri’s gladness (and the world’s need) called her to be a writer. And Keri thinks she enjoys her work as much as, maybe more than, her dad enjoyed his.

As one who has answered her call, Keri asks us some questions:

What is God calling you to do? If you don’t know, the question to start with is what brings you joy? And then, how will you respond to that call?”

¹ <http://www.guideposts.org/faith/daily-devotions/find-your-calling-in-life>

Keri Kent and her father have received a blessing. The work that they do each day fulfills them and they find joy in it. How about you? Are you happy at work or with what you do?

If you are, you are in the minority. “According to Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace Report, only 30% of employees are engaged and inspired at work. The poll is based on a survey of more than 150,000 full- and part-time workers during 2012. 52% of the remaining employees have a perpetual case of the Mondays - they're present, but not particularly excited about their job. The final 18% are actively disengaged or, as Gallup CEO Jim Clifton put it in the report, they ‘roam the halls spreading discontent.’”²

What was life like as a follower of Jesus? It must have been an amazing and interesting experience. There was no way to predict what would happen next. One minute they were filled with awe by the way Jesus used his power or amazed by the authority of his teaching, which was fresh and new. The next minute, they were humbled because of their lack of faith or concerned because of opposition by the political and religious authorities. They went from fear in middle of a boat caught in a storm on the sea to worship and awe when Jesus calmed the sea with a word. Each morning, they must have wondered what the day would bring with anticipation.

One part of the American dream is work that is satisfying and fulfilling. We can't wait to get up each morning and look forward to our day.

When was the last time you felt that way?

What's up? What makes us so unhappy at work and in life? What can we do about it? I think that the way we approach work and life makes all the difference in the world. We need to ask ourselves whether we are doing a job, building a career or following our passion. H. Jackson Brown, Jr. writing for MindTools, poses it this way, “depending on your approach, the things that give you satisfaction will vary:

² Kelli Grant, CNBC, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/06/30/americans-hate-jobs-office-perks/2457089/>

- If you work at a **JOB**, the compensation aspects of the position will probably hold more appeal than anything else, and have the greatest impact on whether you stay or go;
- If you work at a **CAREER**, you are looking for promotions and career development opportunities. Your overall satisfaction is typically linked with your status, power, or position; and
- If you work at a **PASSION**, the work itself is the factor that determines your satisfaction, regardless of money, prestige, or control.”³

Life as a follower of Jesus required dedication, commitment and passion. When Jesus sent the twelve disciples out (Mark 6:7-13), he gave them power over unclean spirits. Jesus also gave them instruction in 6:8-9: “*He ordered them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to take two tunics.*” They had to trust in Jesus and live according to what was given them while proclaiming a message of repentance. They also tended to people who were unwell, casting out demons, anointing the sick with oil and curing many people of their illnesses.

Would you take that job, working with the sick and mentally ill, while proclaiming a message of repentance? And, on top of that, you would have to find food and lodging every night by relying on the charity of others, otherwise you had to sleep outdoors. That doesn’t sound like much fun, yet the disciples must have found it fulfilling. They stayed with Jesus and were obedient to him for more than three years. After his death and resurrection, they obeyed Jesus’ commission and continued his mission and work, serving a hostile world. Most of the disciples died violent deaths for their faith – that’s a true indication of their dedication, commitment and passion.

I don’t think that job description is one that many of us would sign up for right off the bat. But we don’t have to. And the disciples didn’t, either. But there is one thing the disciples did do and that’s recorded in Mark 1:15-20. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew as they stood in the

³ H. Jackson Brown, Jr., http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_94.htm

shallow water of the Sea of Galilee casting their nets for fish, they left their nets and followed him immediately. When Jesus saw James and John sitting in a boat with their father Zebedee and hired men, they were mending fishing nets. Jesus called the brothers, they got out of the boat, left their father and immediately followed him. The disciples responded to Jesus call immediately. There is a sense of urgency in Jesus’ call - there was much to do and only a short time to do it.

The first four disciples immediately followed Jesus – their response was passionate, willing and complete. They walked away from their livelihoods, careers, possessions and families to follow Jesus. They made a choice and they followed through on it, wholeheartedly and faithfully. In contrast, Luke 9:57-62 records the responses of “would-be” followers: one offered to follow but could not accept the lifestyle. One used their own needs as an excuse not to follow Jesus’ call. And the third put his friends before the call to follow Jesus. None of them were committed and passionate followers of Jesus. Without passion and commitment, their words and deeds would be hollow. For them, following Jesus would always be either a job or a path to status or position, seeking to capitalize on the role of ‘Jesus’ disciple.’

Where are you in your faith walk? Did you get up and come to church this morning because it’s an obligation, a task that must be done out of obedience to God? Or did you get up and look forward to coming to worship God with these dear brothers and sisters in Christ?

Do you come and participate in activities at church because there is something to be gained? Are you hoping for status, position or a career in ministry based on your service? Are you disappointed when you aren’t asked to lead but just to come and participate?

Or do you get up every day, grateful for what God has given you? Do you spend quiet time in a private place, reading your Bible, listening to God and praying for others who are in need? Do you serve when and where you are asked without reservation, testing and approving all things with a renewed heart and a transformed mind? Is your heart full of passion and love for Jesus for all he has done to save you and redeem you from your sins?

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, as they struggled to live a Christian lifestyle, giving this advice, *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received”* Ephesians 4:1 (NIV).

I pray you hear and respond to Jesus’ call with total commitment, dedication and passion. If you follow Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, every day of your life will be filled with passion and you will be satisfied and content. Lord, let it be so!

Jonah 3:1-5 (NRSV)

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.