

Lead with the heart, but the head needs to catch up  
A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
January 28, 2024  
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

**Video interview with Connor Ross, on his sense of "Call"**

Dave: Connor, I know that St. Andrew's is very proud of you, as churches always are as they watch a young person grow up amongst them. You are a person who likes to be of help, to share your skills whenever called upon. I wonder, where does that passion to help come from? Does your faith, your belief about God, about Jesus have anything to do with it?

Connor: I believe that this comes from the way I was raised. I agree with that, if I'm able to help anyone at any time, I'm going to use whatever skills and abilities to help people – whether helping someone reach a high shelf in a store to checking on people to make sure they are ok, to volunteering at the church whenever I can. That's just a personal, deep-rooted, belief. I believe being a true and honest Christian is to help people when you can, and not being selfish with that. Use my skill set to grow with people in any given moment. Ultimately, the church has a wide reach, whether it is being tech support for AGMs, to doing Readers, or helping Torrin with Young Adult Church, it is about helping as many people as I can; if I do that, then I've done a pretty good job.

Dave: What was your first memory of contact with a Christian Community or Church?

Connor: So, I've been going to St. Andrew's since I was 11 or 12 years old. So, I have seen the different phases of church life, but my first real memory from church was going to a youth event on Manitoulin Island. It was just a bunch of cool weird people like me playing board games and hanging out – this was great. Ok, cool people are not afraid to show themselves. That is important for me, find people who show their true and honest selves, so when I go to church events, I like to show that to others, especially to younger people to show themselves, that it's ok. It's normal to be silly in church.

Dave: Do you believe that God has created you, put you on this earth to do something particular? What gifts in you do you believe you have in order to make a difference in the world?

Connor: I do think that everyone has a reason for being on the earth. I don't think "fate". I think that my ability to make friends, to problem solve, those are gifts that I've been given and that grow in me, and they help me to make a difference in the world. One of the things is that I want to take my skill set for martial arts and teach people. Aside from the physical element, it is also a spiritual workout. I struggled with a lot of issues when I was younger, confidence issues, but from that experience in martial arts and church, I was able to work on myself in very particular ways. I want to also use my leadership skills outside of my work to be a good church leader. I want to help as many people as I possibly can.

Dave: Do you at all consider that a "call", or do you reserve that category for certain people?

Connor: I would say so! It's not just an idea I got one day, it is something I'm passionate about doing. That qualifies to me as a sense of "call". I believe that this is a Call, this path I am following. It is all part of the journey.

Dave: Is there anything else you wanted to share.

Connor: That I appreciate every single person at St. Andrew's – I have been here many years! I truly feel like this is my church family, and appreciate every little moment I have had here. I wouldn't be in the same mindset without it.

Dave: On behalf of St. Andrew's I thank you for sharing your gifts, especially, Connor, for being willing to do this, and sharing your time and gifts in this way. One wonderful story of call among many here at St. Andrew's. I really appreciated that conversation with Connor Ross.

**(end of video interview)**

Today's Gospel story is a challenging one. Jesus, essentially a stranger coming out of the blue, tells four career fishing folk, Peter and Andrew, then James and John, to drop their nets and follow him.

They do it. Right then and there.

With James and John, there is mention of their father, Zebedee. Mark the storyteller opens this with the mention that John the Baptist has been arrested. Actually, the Greek word is more like "handed over". the same verb Mark will later use in relation to Jesus being handed over to the authorities. This hints at John's imminent execution.

So, in that political reality of John, and soon Jesus, facing religious persecution, prosecution, and soon execution, those young men dropped what they did and followed. Dad, Zebedee, doesn't get to speak, but I think that it's safe to assume that he would not be impressed to watch his sons abandon him. It is a heart response, initially, to respond to God's call. But then reality can set in – the awareness cognitively, that there are risks that come with dropping our nets and following.

I wonder: What is this discipleship Jesus calls us to, in modern times? Is it attending worship on Sundays? Is it our giving, volunteering, persistently living out our faith every minute of every day, even as we face temptation to want to take a day off from our faith?

What is being asked of us? Is it going to push us out of our comfort zones? Connor is a work in progress, as am I. I'm betting that you, here in the sanctuary, you joining on line, are all card-carrying "works in progress."

In these stories of call, there is the celebration of how we let go of rational thought, and just drop our nets to follow – changing jobs, going back to school, finding a side-hustle that allows us to shine with God's light, volunteering with an organization that offers healing and hope. It is exciting at first, but then there is reality, you know, after the new-car smell of following Jesus wears off. We face a crisis of conscience that motivates us to exit our comfort zone. Investments, do we want to know who loses in order for us to gain? Products that we buy – at the grocery store or clothing store – what happens

when we dare to find the tag, where was it picked/made? What about taking a stand of some sort?

We debate quietly in our heads and hearts: if I declare my concern about this issue that may ruffle the feathers of people around me. Maybe it is a very close family member, or friend, who will be disappointed, annoyed, angry at us, embarrassed by us, because we speak out or somehow demonstrate what we believe.

To me, there is no question: we are ALL called by Jesus. The question today is: will we not only answer, but will we dare to risk staying on the path that God has in store for us, risk and all?

Last week was Martin Luther King Day. I asked my browser: What was Dr King's "call" like? I was intrigued in what I discovered.

His Baptist Denomination asked if he would share his testimonial of his Call, and here was a snippet from it: :My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me." <sup>1</sup>

Is that not more the reality of call for most of us?

The publicity person for the American Baptist Convention, made this oh-so-true observation real, lived, experience in modern days: "Apparently many of our young people still feel that unless they see a burning bush or a blinding light on the road Damascus, they haven't been called." <sup>2</sup>

There is the heartfelt response to call. In John Wesley's words, the "heart strangely warmed" initially. But then, the head does have to catch up. An angry father at home spitting epithets upon discovering empty nets, and fisher sons gone. This is yours and my Mission, should we choose to accept it. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> MLKP, MBU, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers, 1954-1968, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Mass.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid