

Advent Lutheran Church  
Answering the Call  
January 26, 2025  
Luke 5:1-11

Most of us lead rather ordinary lives. On any given day our schedule is filled with familiar commitments and considerable consistency. However, all of us have had one of those days when the ordinary suddenly became extraordinary.

This morning's Gospel lesson begins with an ordinary story about an ordinary day. Fishermen are fishing. Some days are better than others. They are tired and frustrated having worked all night without catching any fish.

I can imagine how thrilled they were when their special guest, Jesus, invites them to cast their nets one final time before calling it a day. Jesus seems to be a nice guy and a good preacher, but he doesn't own any boats and has no track record in the industry.

Nonetheless, Simon obeys. And in his obedience, he experiences a catch unlike any other. His nets overflow. And, his personal transformation begins.

How did Jesus call his first disciples?

According to Luke it started on a boat, continued with a confession, and ended with a call to trade in fishing for fish for something greater: fishing for people.

According to Matthew and Mark no boat was needed. In their accounts, Jesus is walking by the water when he issues an invitation for the fisherman to step away from their nets to fish for people.<sup>1</sup>

Four fisherman – Simon Peter, James, John, and Andrew – found that answering Jesus' call changes everything.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 1:16-20 and Matthew 4:18-22.

This week I've been thinking about what it means to answer Jesus' call. In reviewing many examples, including those found in Scripture and in our contemporary context, I've been reminded that Jesus meets people where they are.

Then and now, Jesus is calling. Jesus is calling all of us to bring all of ourselves to follow him. And, Jesus is telling us that answering the call is not a once in a lifetime decision; it is a daily lifestyle choice.

This week Bishop Mariann Budde became a household name for doing what she has done for decades: preaching the Gospel. For those not in the know, she is an Episcopalian priest who serves as the Bishop of Diocese of Washington.<sup>2</sup>

Her homily at the Inaugural Prayer Service focused on unity and ended with a call for mercy. More specifically she invited the incoming President to have mercy on those who are marginalized, many of whom are now living in fear.

Bishop Budde called on President Trump to have mercy on gay, lesbian, and transgender folks. And, she asked that he have mercy on immigrants and to remember that "our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land."<sup>3</sup>

It's important to note she's been at this for a long time. In fact, just a couple of years ago she wrote a book on how to be brave.<sup>4</sup>

We are not Episcopalians. As ELCA Lutherans, however, we are in full communion with her denomination. Our ELCA leaders have made special statements this week in response to the incoming President's executive orders and Bishop Budde's message.

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<sup>2</sup> Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, available from <https://edow.org/about/bishop-mariann/>

<sup>3</sup> Washington National Cathedral. "1.21.25 Sermon by The Right Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde," January 21, 2025, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwwaEuDeqM8>

<sup>4</sup> Mariann Budde. *How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith* (Avery, 2023).

On Friday Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, published a pastoral letter about the executive orders that includes these words:

“As a church, we are called to speak up when the government distorts or denies the image of God in each person by endangering access to protection, peace and daily bread. Where harm or inequity occur, we are called by God to respond with love and advocacy.”<sup>5</sup>

Bishop Budde and Presiding Bishop Eaton are inviting us to answer the call. Following Jesus is always about answering the call. And, answering the call in this moment requires us to be brave as we love and serve our neighbors – especially the neighbors named by Bishop Budde: LGBTQ folks and immigrants.

Within hours of his inauguration, the President signed an executive order declaring that the federal government will no longer recognize transgender people. Effectively immediately, people are male or female.

Another executive order issued this week removed LGBTQ protections enacted by the last President, including executive orders preventing discrimination against LGBTQ people and protecting trans people in the military.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, all mentions of “LGBTQ” were removed from the WhiteHouse.gov website.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly today – the final Sunday in January – is set aside by some Lutheran congregations as Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Sunday. Many ELCA congregations have become Reconciling congregations, which is to say they’ve gone through a process to commit to the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in all aspects of

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<sup>5</sup> Presiding Bishop Eaton Issues Pastoral Message on Executive Orders, available at <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/presiding-bishop-eaton-issues-pastoral-message-on-executive-orders>

<sup>6</sup> Dallas Voice, “Trump signs executive orders targeting LGBTQ Americans,” January 21, 2025, available at <https://dallasvoice.com/trump-signs-executive-orders-targeting-lgbtq-americans/>

<sup>7</sup> GLAAD. “Trump Administrative Removes LGBTQ and HIV Resources from White House and Other Government Websites,” available at <https://glaad.org/releases/breaking-trump-administration-removes-lgbtq-and-hiv-resources-from-white-house-and-other-government-websites/>

the life and leadership of their congregation.<sup>8</sup> To be clear, Advent has not undertaken this journey.

And, to be honest and transparent, you should know that I am a member of Cathedral of Hope United Church of Christ – America’s largest primarily LGBTQ congregation. Cathedral is a congregation that not only welcomes but celebrates LGBTQ people.

This morning as we seek to answer the call, we must be ready to support our LGBTQ siblings. On an individual level, being an ally includes listening and learning, creating safe spaces, standing with, and using our voices and influence to advocate for LGBTQ rights. And, on a congregational level, it means we must be ready to do more and be willing to live into the welcome component of our new purpose statement.

Not only are many in the LGBTQ community living in fear because of what has happened this week, so also are many immigrants.

Since we last gathered for worship there has been much talk about mass deportations alongside actions to remove longstanding restrictions on where such activity can occur. ICE has been granted the right to conduct raids in sensitive spaces, including churches and schools.<sup>9</sup>

Incredibly some American citizens have had to question if they are truly welcome in their own country due to an executive order that seeks to end birthright citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

Christianity has much to say about how to treat immigrants and our own denomination has been a leader in recent years. In 2019, the ELCA became the first North American denomination to declare itself a sanctuary church body.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Reconciling in Christ Sunday 2025, available at <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/ricsunday/>

<sup>9</sup> Migrants Can Now be Arrested at Churches and Schools, January 22, 2025, available at <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/migrants-can-now-be-arrested-at-churches-and-schools-after-trump-administration-throws-out-policies>

<sup>10</sup> While a judge has issued a temporary restraining order this matter is far from resolved.

<sup>11</sup> ELCA Churchwide Assembly Declares ELCA Sanctuary Church, August 7, 2019, available at <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/8000>

As a sanctuary denomination, the ELCA believes that “walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Suddenly many families are living in fear. Some are responding by keeping their children home from school. Others are hesitating to go to work or to ask for help from community resources like food pantries.

In response, ELCA Bishops from Region 1 issued a statement on immigration that begins with these words<sup>13</sup>

“As Lutherans, we are called to live out the teachings of Jesus Christ, who welcomed strangers and emphasized love, mercy, and justice for all people. We believe that every human being, regardless of their country of origin or legal status, is created in the image of God and has inherent dignity and worth. This foundational truth compels us to approach the issue of immigration with compassion and a commitment to the common good.”

This morning as we seek to answer the call, we must be ready to support our immigrant siblings. On an individual level, being an ally includes listening and learning, creating safe spaces, standing with, and using our voices and influence to advocate for immigrants’ rights. And, on a congregational level, it means we must be ready collaborate more intentionally with Advent and be willing to embody our mission of living and loving like Jesus.

Maybe you are here today because “attend worship” is a regular, recurring, and ordinary entry on your personal Sunday morning calendar. Or perhaps you came to church today because you needed to hear a message of hope after a week that exhausted you. Regardless of why you are listening to me preach, know that Jesus invites you to answer the call.

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<sup>12</sup> ELCA. “Sanctuary Denomination,” available at <https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/ammparo/sanctuarychurch>

<sup>13</sup> A Statement on Immigration from the Bishops of Region One of the ELCA, January 22, 2025, available at <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Faith-Communities-and-Immigration---From-Bishop-Shelley-Bryan-Wee.html?soid=1102207044814&aid=Y3GK83yG0WA>

And so I invite you now to commit or to recommit to following the Way of Jesus.

As I wrap up, I can think of no better way to end this message than to share the words that concluded Bishop Budde's sermon:

May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love and walk humbly with each other and our God for the good of all people . . . Amen."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Washington National Cathedral. "1.21.25 Sermon."