Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, June 7, 2026
"The Invitation"

Young at Heart Message

Imagine that you receive an invitation to a wedding.

What are the first things you might do when you receive an invitation to determine if you will attend or not?

You might:

1. Look at who is inviting you. How well do you know the people?

2. When is it? Does it conflict with any other plans you already had?

3. If it does conflict with plans you already have, are the plans you had flexible? Do you WANT to change them?

4. If it doesn't conflict with plans you already had, to you WANT to go?

5. Where is it? How far away is it? Do you need to fly or can you drive?

6. What else might you need to give up to attend this wedding? Will you miss out on time spent with someone else, or will you spend more money than you have or want to spend on a wedding?

After you have weighed all the basic questions you might have about the wedding, you can determine if you'll attend or not and you can return your RSVP.

But ultimately, you have two options:

✅ Yes, I will attend

❌ No, I will not attend

I suppose there might be some other options, such as "I will get a gift or send a card, but cannot attend." But for planning purposes for the people who invited you, your choices are yes, or no.

Now, what if we were invited to do something much more difficult to decide on?

As an example, I am going to use my invitation to come to Calgary to pastor a church.

This was a lot more complex decision to make. I won't even be able to list all of the things I had to think about before choosing to say "yes" to coming here, but here are a few things I had to consider:

1. Do I WANT to move to Canada?

2. Do I want to leave my current church?

3. Do I want to give up running my business?

4. Do I want to sell the house I just bought?

5. Do I want to leave my family and friends behind and go to a place where I don't know anyone?

6. Can my dogs – the only family who could come along – go with me?

7. Can I afford to do this?

8. What else am I giving up to do this?

9. What might I gain?

10. What am I afraid of?

This list could go on and on.

The point here is this:

We cannot be called *to* something without first being called *away* from something else.

Every invitation we receive – whether it's something relatively minor like a wedding invitation or something major like an invitation to a new job – requires us to make a choice between what we had planned, and what could be.

We cannot choose one thing without giving up something else.

It is possible, of course, to set our life up in such a way that we reduce the number of decisions we might need to make like this.

This is why we create routines. Routines are safe, and they protect us from having to make difficult decisions.

When we set up routines, we prioritize the things that are most important to us and we choose to spend our time on those things.

But, no matter how well we might set up our routine to reduce the need to make choices, unexpected things still crop up that require thought.

The Message

So, that leads us to today's scripture passage.

In Matthew 4: 18-20, we hear Jesus call his first four disciples who were all in the middle of their daily routines: Peter and Andrew were called while they were casting their net into the sea, and James and John were in a boat with their father mending their nets.

In today's scripture passage from Matthew 9:13, Jesus sees Matthew working at a counting desk collecting taxes.

Matthew is in the middle of his daily routine when he is called as well.

It isn't as though these people that Jesus called didn't have anything else to do with their time.

None of them were sitting idly by, waiting for an invitation from someone to do something. All of these men were working – presumably to provide for themselves and possibly for their families as well.

Matthew was employed by Rome and likely risked a lot to leave his post.

And yet, Jesus called, and each of these men followed immediately.

They didn't even do what most of us do, which is exactly what I did earlier – they didn't make lists of questions or concerns they had about re-arranging their entire life in order to accept this invitation.

Matthew didn't choose Jesus in this moment – Jesus chose *Matthew*.

Jesus chose a tax collector – someone who was seen as an oppressor, a traitor, and a generally "shady" human being by most standards of the day.

And Matthew, in obedient service, follows Jesus the moment he calls.

He doesn't appear to even wonder what will happen when Pharisees wonder what he's doing with Jesus. He doesn't appear to even wonder if he is *worthy* of being called by Jesus in the first place.

He simply obeys Jesus's command and follows him.

Matthew has two choices in this moment:

✅ Yes I will

❌ No, I won't

Matthew doesn't get a chance to prepare himself. The expectation here is simple: you either follow and I will teach you what you need to know, or you do not. There is no room for hesitation.

And we see that Matthew heeds the call. He accepts the invitation without hesitation.

Jesus calls this man that everyone else sees as having an unacceptable status, and Matthew doesn't question why Jesus calls him. He simply gets up and follows.

This is quite incredible.

What is implied in Matthew's choice to follow Jesus is the fact that he must leave his desk – his post presumably given to him by Rome. This desk which is a symbol of his "sinfulness" according to the local customs.

This story, then, is a reminder that God never calls us *to* something without first calling us *away* from something else.

In fact, it would be impossible not to be called away from something else, because we all have limited time in our lives and we naturally fill that time with doing things that are important, at least in the moment.

Some people may never fully come into discipleship because they find themselves unable to let go of commitments in which they are legitimately engaged before the call of God comes into their lives.

Any of the five disciples mentioned – Peter, Andrew, James, John, or Matthew – could have chosen not to answer the call because they could not leave their work, their families, or the lives they were living to follow.

Similarly, I could have chosen not to answer my call here for the same reasons.

I was already legitimately engaged in multiple aspects of life when I received the call here.

In fact, all pastors are legitimately engaged – in ministry, in their communities, in their lives, and often also in the lives of their children – when they receive a call to a new church.

So, choosing to decline a call is understandable. And we don't actually know – maybe Jesus called others before or in between these disciples who declined to follow because they could not leave the lives they were engaged in.

But, the thing about a call or an invitation like this is that you can never get to the next thing that God has for you until you can let go of where you are and follow.

It requires tremendous trust and faith in a God who might be asking you to do something that feels risky, but who is also asking you to trust that the risk will pay off.

It may not always seem that way right away – the disciples, for example, had to go through some extremely difficult periods of danger, grief, and loss in order to follow Jesus.

I had to go through some extremely challenging periods over the last 3 years as well.

And, while the challenging moments seem to be fewer and further between, they still crop up.

And yet in both cases, the risk was worth the reward.

The disciples got to experience something that no one else in the history of time got to experience.

And likewise, I have gotten to experience things that I never would have had opportunity for had I not accepted this call.

The call of God is far-reaching. Most people – including the Pharisees – who saw Jesus call Matthew questioned that choice.

But Jesus saw something in Matthew that no one else was willing to see. He took a chance on him, and Matthew delivered.

Jesus saw something in Matthew that he deemed worthy.

And Jesus sees something in us that deems us worthy, as well.

You can't get to the next thing that God has for you until you can let go of where you are now and follow the call.

God calls us because we are worthy of being called.

God calls us to step outside our comfortable places and see what else there is to see.

God calls us to a life of wonder and new possibilities.

So, may we each consider what God is calling us to, and may we accept the risk and rewards of following.

May you open your heart and your mind to hear God's call and may you consider boldly stepping forward to accept the call.

God believes you are worthy, and the Good News we hear in scripture is that God wants *you* to believe you are worthy, too.

So as you leave here today, may you know with certainty that you are worthy – of God's love, God's call, and God's grace.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Glorious and gracious God, we come before you today with hope in the future. And, we come before with deep and steady faith that you are always leading us and guiding us, even when life gets difficult or uncertain. We ask that you help us to hear and then heed your call. Help us to take the risk to accept your nudges because we know that we cannot get to the next thing you have for us if we are not willing to put one foot in front of the other. God, help us to be willing. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.