Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten us with your celestial fire. For if you are with us then nothing else matters. And if you are not with us, then nothing else matters. Be with us, we pray, in the name of your beloved. Amen.

I was about to sit down to dinner when my friend Donna called: “Hello, Holly, this is Donna. I know we haven't talked for awhile and this is a call from out of the blue, but I'm calling because I've just been in an accident and could use a ride home.”

"Of course," I replied. "Where are you? Are you okay?"

She told me she was on 35W and that she was okay and once the tow truck guy told her where they were going to go, she’d give me another call.

I put on my shoes and jacket and got my car keys and by then she called me back and I was out the door and on my way to go get her.

What would it take for you to drop everything and go? What would cause you to stop whatever you are doing and do something different?

Those questions get at the heart of today's Bible story: What did it take for the disciples to drop everything and go and follow Jesus? Was it really as easy as it seemed?

In Mark’s account we read that after John the Baptizer was arrested, Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee when he saw Simon and his brother Andrew fishing. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And, seemingly without another thought or question or time for remorse, the two of them followed him. A little farther on Jesus saw James and his brother John, called to them and they left their father and followed him.

Now I don't know about you—it doesn't seem to me that these four men simply left their work because they wanted something easier and less demanding—but it leaves me with the question: What inspired them to drop their nets and follow Jesus?

There’s no conversation about their relationship, what else Jesus may have said to them, if they had known him before this moment, if they were friends. The details are few. We don't know if the two sets of brothers knew each other, which might have made it easier for James and John to say 'yes' if they knew Peter and Andrew were in on it.

Nothing is available to us to make their willingness to follow Jesus more understandable.

What we do know is that Jesus and his message were so compelling that these and many others chose to follow him, to become disciples of his message and servants of his mission.
I have a hard time connecting with such stories because I can't picture myself ever doing such a thing, ever saying 'yes' to someone and, leaving all else behind, deciding to follow that person.

And yet, people have done it. I know of people who have followed a successful career—gotten all their schooling and experience in a high income area such as finance, some even becoming leaders in their field—when they hear the call to ministry and they seemingly drop everything and follow. In my seminary days, I was unusual in that I had only been out of college two years before I went there. So many people in my classes were pursuing ministry as a second career. In seminary I sat next to a former rancher, former teachers, a former bank executive, and 2 former lawyers. Each had come because they could no longer ignore their call. They could no longer ignore the urge to pursue full time ministry. They felt the call to ordained ministry and some of them even abandoned lucrative positions in order to do so.

But most of us aren't looking for another career.

The thing is, the Bible story gives us no back-story, nothing to hang our hats on. Is the Bible telling us to be impulsive and drop everything we have when someone compelling enough comes along?

Such a message is not sustainable, not achievable by most, if not all, of us. I don't think this is the Bible's message at all. Instead I think the point is, in part, the back story. In the story about my friend stranded on 35W, I didn't tell you how we've known each other for over 20 years, how we worked together for several years at the same church, how she's called me the sister she never had. I didn't tell you that I know some of her deepest, darkest secrets and she knows some of mine. I didn't tell you, though you could probably sense it from the story, that she's the kind of friend you can be absent from for years and when you get back together again it's like you never left. I didn't tell you that in many ways she feels like a sister to me.

I didn't tell you all those details, but you could sense it in the story.

That's why I get the sense that in the gospel of Mark there's more to the story than meets the eye. There must be some back story, some relationship, some energy that has gone into making a connection between Jesus and his disciples even before they became his disciples.

So what about us? What is our back story? What brings us here to this place and this time? What is the character of our relationship with Jesus? Have we been putting the time, energy and resources into this relationship such that, if the opportunity arose, we would drop everything and follow him?

Jesus wants us to be in relationship with him, to belong to him, to talk with him in prayer, to learn more of his back story through Bible Study, to spend time on the
relationship so that it is on such a firm footing that we would feel comfortable calling him our brother, our friend.

After I picked Donna up, we sat in my car for a bit as she finished her call with the insurance agent. Then we drove to a nearby restaurant and I bought her supper, since neither of us had eaten. Over dinner we talked a bit about the accident, but mostly we caught up on one another’s lives.

When supper was over, I drove her back to her house and we parted with a hug.

She knew I had her back and I knew, if the need ever arose, she would have my back. That’s what friendship is. That’s what friendship does. Friendship means you are there when you are needed. Friendship means that regardless of the twists and turns of life, you will always be there for one another.

Rev. Julie Pennington-Russell writes of an experience she had a few years ago. She writes: I have a friend. He’s a man in his late 60s. Rugged, burly, brilliant guy. He’s always reminded me a little of the Marlborough Man. He studied at a prestigious university in the East some years ago, and then he moved to Texas to work on his doctorate. But somewhere along the way he became addicted to cocaine—just tumbled into that dark hole. Lost his family, lost his place in graduate school, lost big pieces of himself. But somehow he washed up on the shores of a good church. And when he did, he was so fragile—he looked like he'd been "rode hard and put up wet" as they say in Texas. But the folks in that church put their arms around that man and slowly he started to heal, and eventually, miraculously, even reunited with his wife and children.

We had this couple in our home for dinner and the man began to talk with Tim and me about where his life was going. "I want to believe," he said, "that my best days aren't behind me, and that my life can still count, can still make a difference for God." He sat at our table with his head in his hands. "I just can't help but feel like I've blown all of my best chances," he said. That's when his wife, who's just this wonderful, middle-aged bohemian Texas flower child kind of woman, reached over and took his hand and said, "Baby, you've got to take your sticky fingers off that steering wheel. If God could yank Jesus out of a grave, I figure he can make something beautiful out of busted parts."

God can make something beautiful out of busted parts, can use whatever we have to assemble a life of relationship with Christ. We belong to Christ, no matter where we've gone, no matter what we've done, Jesus calls us back to him, to be in relationship, a relationship that started with the water of our baptism.

We need to be in relationship—with one another and with Jesus Christ, so that when we hear that call to follow, or that call to do something difficult, or that call to do something that you never in a million years would ever do, you'll have that relationship with Christ, that will enable you to straighten up and respond, "I will follow you, Jesus. Anywhere you lead me, I'll go."