

REFLECTION 7TH JUNE 2026 “OUR CALLING”

By Rev Dr Fei Taule’ale’ausumai

Genesis 12:1–9 and Matthew 9:9–13

I wonder if any of you can remember a time when you felt called to do something. Perhaps it was a career change. Perhaps it was moving to a new city. Perhaps it was getting married, becoming a parent, volunteering in the community, or taking on a new role after retirement.

Sometimes a call arrives as a loud voice that cannot be ignored. More often, it comes as a gentle nudge, a feeling that life is inviting us in a new direction.

This week's readings give us two remarkable call stories: the call of Abraham in Genesis and the call of Matthew in the Gospel of Matthew. At first glance, they seem very different.

Abraham is an elderly nomad living nearly two thousand years before Jesus. Matthew is a tax collector living under Roman occupation in first-century Palestine. One is called to leave his homeland. The other is called to leave his workplace.

Yet beneath the differences lies the same question:

What happens when life invites us into something new?

And perhaps the deeper question for us today is:

Can we still hear a call at every stage of life?

To understand Abraham's call, we need to understand the world he lived in.

Abraham lived in a society where family was everything. There was no pension scheme, no social welfare system, no insurance company. Your security came from your

extended family, your tribe, your land, your animals, and your ancestors. Everything about your identity was tied to where you belonged.

When God says, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you," it sounds almost impossible.

God does not tell Abraham exactly where he is going. God does not provide a map. God does not tell him how long the journey will take. God simply says, "Go." For Abraham, leaving meant stepping away from everything familiar and everything secure. The risk was enormous. The promise could prove empty.

Yet Abraham goes. And perhaps the most remarkable detail is that Abraham is seventy-five years old.

Many people think of seventy-five as a time to slow down. Are there any 75 year olds here who feel you could move on from here and start again? Faith, in this story, is not certainty. Faith is taking the next step without seeing the whole path ahead.

Last June, while travelling in China, I found myself sitting beside a young woman whose story has stayed with me ever since. She was originally from Shanghai but now lived in Finland with her husband and children. As we talked, she described the life they had built there. Education was free. Healthcare was free. Their children received government support. Life was stable and secure.

By many measures, she and her family were doing well and thriving in Finland.

Yet as she spoke, tears began to flow. She was part of the generation born during China's one-child policy. For decades many Chinese families were restricted to having only one child. That policy has now created a new challenge as parents grow older. There is often only one son or daughter to care for them. Her ageing parents still lived in Shanghai. They were becoming increasingly dependent on her. She felt the pull of obligation, love, duty, and responsibility. Part of her felt she should return to China to care for them. Yet her husband and children had built their lives in Finland and had no desire to move.

As I listened, I realised she was carrying an impossible dilemma. Whichever direction she chose would involve loss. If she remained in Finland, she worried about her

parents. If she returned to China, she would be uprooting her own family. There was no easy answer.

As I listened to her story, I found myself thinking about my own call when I was teaching in Birmingham, I loved what I was doing but the call to return home was strong as my father had had a stroke. It was disruptive and inconvenient but I had to discern it all the same. I returned home to Aotearoa, I had 18 months with my dad before he passed away. It was the right decision even though I struggled with it.

Leaving one place often means leaving people we love. Following a call often involves competing loyalties. It can mean living with uncertainty and carrying the weight of difficult choices.

Perhaps that is why Abraham's journey still speaks to us today. It reminds us that call is rarely simple. It often asks us to hold together hope and heartbreak, possibility and responsibility, courage and uncertainty.

Like that young woman from Shanghai, Abraham could not see a perfect solution. He could only take the next step and trust that the path would unfold as he walked it.

Matthew's the tax collector's call could not have been more different. By the time we meet him, Palestine is occupied by the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers patrol the streets. Taxes are collected to support a foreign power.

Tax collectors were often viewed with suspicion and resentment. They worked for the Roman system and collected money from their own people. Whether or not Matthew himself was dishonest, tax collectors were often associated with corruption and exploitation. As a result, they were frequently excluded from respectable society. Religious leaders distrusted them. Ordinary people avoided them. Matthew may have had financial security, but he may not have had much community acceptance.

Then Jesus walks by and says: "Follow me." Just two words. No explanation.

No detailed plan. No guarantee of success. Simply: "Follow me." And Matthew gets up and follows. There is great risk. He leaves a secure income.

He leaves a known future. He joins a wandering teacher who owns little, travels constantly, and will eventually be crucified by the authorities.

From a practical point of view, it makes very little sense.

Matthew's call reminds us that vocation is not always about becoming more successful. Sometimes it is about becoming more fully ourselves. Jesus sees something in Matthew that others cannot see. The religious authorities see a tax collector. The community sees a collaborator. Jesus sees a disciple.

Sometimes the call of God is not about changing what we do. Sometimes it is about seeing ourselves differently and discovering possibilities that others have overlooked.

Both these call stories involve letting go before receiving. That may be one of the hardest truths about calling. We often want all the answers before we begin. We want certainty before commitment. We want the map before we start the journey. But Abraham and Matthew remind us that calling rarely works that way. The invitation comes first. Understanding comes later.

One of the assumptions of our society is that calling belongs to younger people. Young people are asked: "What are you going to do with your life?"

For us older folk we are often asked: "What did you do with your life?" Notice the difference. One question looks forward. The other looks backward. Yet Abraham challenges that assumption. At seventy-five, he receives a new beginning.

Retirement may mark the end of paid employment. It does not mark the end of purpose. As I mentioned in this week's E News my sister said:

- From sixty-five to seventy are the "go-go years."
- From seventy to seventy-five are the "go-slow years."
- From seventy-five onwards are the "anything-goes years."

Violet is 66 going on 67 I'm 65, Helen is 63 going on to 64. We are she says in the "go, go" years.

For Abraham "At seventy-five, God still said, 'Go.' Perhaps some of us need to hear that today. Our usefulness does not end when we retire. Our calling does not expire when we receive a pension. Life may change its shape, but purpose continues.

For many middle-aged people, life is crowded. There are careers to manage.

Bills to pay. Parents to care for. Children and grandchildren to support.

Responsibilities come from every direction. The call at this stage may not involve moving countries or changing professions. It may involve re-evaluating priorities.

The call may be less about changing location and more about changing direction. Perhaps the middle years are not about having arrived. Perhaps they are about continuing to become.

What Does This Mean for Young People? Young people today face pressures that previous generations never imagined. Climate anxiety. Economic uncertainty. Housing affordability. Rapid technological change. Many feel pressured to know exactly where life is heading. What career should I choose?

Where will I live? What kind of future will I have?

Abraham and Matthew offer a different message. Neither knew the destination. Neither had a five-year plan. Neither could see the whole picture.

The call was simply to take the next faithful step.

Perhaps young people do not need all the answers. Perhaps they only need the courage for the next step. A call is rarely a complete blueprint for life.

More often, it is an invitation to trust, to learn, and to keep moving forward.

Calling is found wherever people participate in healing, justice, compassion, creativity, and community. A church creating a community where everyone belongs may be called.

The Spirit continues to call people into the work of healing the world.

The call of Abraham and the call of Matthew remind us that vocation is not about age. It is not about status. It is not about certainty. It is about openness. The willingness to leave behind what is familiar. The courage to trust what we cannot yet see. And the faith to believe that life is always inviting us into something new.

Whether we are twenty-five, fifty-five, seventy-five, or ninety-five, the question is not whether our calling has ended. The question is: Where is life inviting us now? What familiar thing might we need to leave behind? And where is the Spirit leading us next?

The good news of both Abraham and Matthew is that calling does not have an expiry date. As long as we have breath, as long as we have love to give, as long as there is justice to seek and community to build, the invitation remains. Go. Follow. Trust. And know that the journey is still unfolding. Amen.