

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
January 22, 2017
Matthew 4:12-23

Again this week, we hear the story of the calling of the disciples in our reading from Matthew. “And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’” (4:19) Why would they leave their home, their lifestyle to follow someone they knew almost nothing about into an unfamiliar life?

At this point, Jesus was not well known. He had been recently baptized by John and had not really begun his ministry. So his reputation had not preceded him. The two pairs of young men he approached were drawn by something in Jesus; something powerful. What was it that drew them? The clue may be found in a line from our psalm today. “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.”

When we yearn for connection with God, it seems, we will not be disappointed. And God will answer us in the way we least expect. Not when we’re praying perhaps, not when we’re alone. But it seems that if we are open, we will recognize the call. We will be drawn to respond.

Jesus is able to connect with people where they are. He walks near where the people are working and uses an everyday image from their working lives to describe the work he is about to involve them in. “I will make you fish for people.” That must have been a

startling image; something familiar, but with a definite twist. He didn't promise them enlightenment or anything for their own edification. No, he promised to make them effective in gathering people together and feeding them.

We're told that he found two of the brothers, James and John, in a boat with their father. And called them to follow. This stirs up all sorts of images and feelings. There's the sense that this fishing was a way of life that went back for generations for these people. Father has taught son, and so on, down through time. So Jesus is asking the young people to leave the only life they'd known and start something new.

Mending their nets, conjures up the idea of needing to prepare and take care. And to be involved in the day-to-day, nitty-gritty details of life. Jesus is going to do that – he's going to work with his disciples as he finds them, preparing each of them for the work ahead, and taking care of them as they follow him in his daily life of teaching, proclaiming the good news, and healing. He will do all of this in the midst of the people's lives, as they gather around the village well, as he walks through people's farms, and as he share meals and accepts people's hospitality.

Leaving to follow him – “immediately” - it says, gives a sense of clarity and readiness. They obviously didn't know who or what they were waiting for, but when it arrived in the person of Jesus, they recognized their heart's longing, and responded without thought. So we get the sense of the call Jesus makes that goes directly to their

hearts and they are prepared to leave all that is familiar and venture out into the complete unknown. But they do not go alone; they are called in pairs and follow the One who calls them.

Preparation then is not about knowing theology, about being an educated person necessarily. It seems to be more about acknowledging a yearning within and keeping eyes and ears open as we go about our daily business.

We love to hear about people's mountain top experiences, the miracles, the astonishing stories. But in today's gospel, we are drawn into an everyday scene with astounding results.

Can we take a minute and just imagine the scene for ourselves? Close your eyes if you wish. Feel the morning sun warming your shoulders, the breeze coming off the lake gently brushing your cheeks. Look over the water to the mist in the distance; slowly evaporating. The water is lapping at the bow of your boat as you bend over your net; slowly re-knotting the torn net resting over your knees. You can hear the other boatmen chatting quietly as they prepare to head out for a day of fishing. Everything is familiar, the sounds, smells, the activity involved in the work you do everyday. You feel relaxed and focused.

Now you become aware of a slight change. People are no longer chatting. You look up and see a stranger coming along the beach towards you. Something grabs in your gut. You've never seen this person before yet something inside you knows him. He seems to be heading directly for you. You look to your brother in the boat with

you. He seems mesmerized; his eyes on the man, his mouth slightly open. The man approaching looks like someone from the region, dressed like a worker, a simple man. Yet there is nothing simple about the way he holds himself. He is self-possessed. And as he comes near, his eyes are looking right into yours; something no one with any manners would do. You cannot look away. His eyes are clear and full, you do not feel confronted. Your heart leaps and before his invitation is fully formed – “Come and follow me,” – you jump up, making your answer clear. You sense your brother has done the same, and you both clamber out of the boat and follow him down the beach where he approaches 2 other young people you know. Their response is the same. Yes. I don’t know why, but ‘Yes, I didn’t know it before, but yes, this is what I’ve always wanted. To be known, wanted, needed and shown the way.”

When you’re ready, come back to St. Mary’s, to the pew you’re sitting on.

Many of us have had experiences where someone, or something has touched us in a way we don’t understand but we know we have to respond and we’re willing and ready in that instant to step out into the unknown. Perhaps it was love at first sight and the deep down knowledge that love had arrived for you in the shape of a particular person. “I’m going to marry that person,” we think.

Or maybe, like Craig Kielburger, the young Canadian who as a young teenager responded incredulously to a newspaper article about child labour in the third world. He knew he couldn’t stand by

when children were enslaved elsewhere in the world and that set him on a path that changed his world. He and his brother founded Me to We, a for-profit social enterprise founded in 2008 that provides socially responsible products and services and donates half of the net profits to a partner non-profit called We Charity.

These are big heart responses. But our hearts respond all the time, if we pay attention. We call our responses – “intuition,” or “a gut feeling,” or, “I just knew I had to,” and sometimes, we bypass words and just respond without thinking. We reach out and touch someone, or something pops out of our mouth and the person tells us that’s exactly what they needed to hear. Maybe we call a friend and they tell us they were just thinking about us. Or we take a right turn, instead of a left, and find ourselves somewhere we’ve never been confronted with a sunset over the water that blows our socks off. We’ve all had those moments, right?

God is reaching out to us all the time. To each one of us in ways that are unique to us. In the ordinariness of our daily lives. In the moments when we’re least aware of God. Our times of prayer and worship help us exercise the muscles of awareness and gratitude and sometimes we experience God in these times. But often, maybe the word “and” is better here – And more often, God surprises us in the mundane moments of our days. When we’re least expecting it.

The aching, and the yearning, and the peace that passes all understanding are all part of being called by God. So that we will be willing to venture out of what is known and familiar into new

experiences and relationships. And so we can trust that we are being cared for and prepared to join in God's re-creation as we step out with Jesus to teach, to proclaim the gospel and to heal the hurts of the world.

Amen.