

3rd Sunday Epiphany B 12

January 22, 2012

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

To what life is God calling you? A compelling question on this day as we listen and watch Jesus walk along the Sea of Galilee calling out to Simon and Andrew, James and John. Last week we heard the Gospel of John's version of the calling of the disciples with Jesus inviting them to 'come and see'. Jesus was appealing to them to come and give it a try, to come and see what he is doing to listen to what he is saying.

Not so this week. In the Gospel of Mark there is little dialog and few facts. Here in the span of 6 verses Jesus appears, gets baptized by John in the river Jordan, spends 40 days in the wilderness overcoming temptations to beginning his ministry. Here Jesus walks back onto the stage after John the Baptist is arrested, Jesus speaks his first words, 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the Good News.'

Immediately Jesus walks down the beach calling out to the first people he sees, commanding them; 'come follow me.' The amazing thing is they do. This is the first the gospel writer, mentions these four men and as far as we know they do not even know who this guy is who walks by calling for them to follow.

Simon and Andrew appear to be poor fishermen, without a boat they would have caught fish by throwing out the nets from the shallow waters and dragging them back to shore. On the other hand James and John were part of a family business with their father Zebedee including boats and hired men. Here Jesus calls the wealthy and successful as well as the poor long working men to follow.

That is why I both admire and wonder why or how James and John, Simon and Andrew could just drop everything and leave. As far as we know as they

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heard Jesus call and they picked themselves up, wiped off the sand clinging to them and hurried off to catch up with Jesus as he continued on his journey.

What would be compelling enough to draw you away from all you knew? Even more, what would be compelling enough to draw you into a new life? This is the part of the Gospel story that often connects to my life. I look back some almost 20 years now and see how it is that God was calling me to come and to follow. How God in Jesus was at work in my life to saying, I have something different planned for you, I have a new way of life for you.

Yet I can tell you I did not drop everything, I did not just walk away from my prior life to come and follow. I can assure you I went kicking and screaming, with doubts and reasons enough to write a book about. That is why the reading from Jonah connects even more with me. Jonah's story as you know starts with a call to go to Nineveh yet he refuses and heads off in the opposite direction. Only here in the middle of the story after being called by God a second time does Jonah ultimately go to Nineveh. There Jonah gets the best response of any Prophet in the Old Testament, as the whole city, from the King all the way down to the lowest animal, repents and seeks forgiveness. Here God was at work using Jonah to call people into relationship with him, to accomplish all God intended him to do.

To what life is God calling you? Last week in some of my reading I came across some quotes by Martin Luther King Jr. In one he said; *"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'here lives a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"*

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Isn't that what the church should be about? Helping you, its members, to become the kind of people you want to be and even more, the person you believe God is calling you to be? For ultimately it is not the work we are doing. For if it is about the good works we are doing then we fall back into that old argument of works righteousness. That somehow if we work hard enough, if we pray hard enough, if we give enough, or help with every event that God in Christ will see us as faithful because of all the good things we have done.

This is hard for us as Americans, as we often believe we are defined by what we accomplish and the things we do. Yet that is just another form of idolatry because we somehow believe that God helps those who help themselves. Which leads us to believe that God cannot call those people who have lost their way or who have made terrible choices in life or those who struggle with addiction or depression or illness and those who seem to be more focused on the things of the world than upon him.

Ultimately it is God in Jesus who walks by calling us, commanding us to 'come and follow'. This is not a story about the power of 4 men giving up everything as an example for others. It is about the power of God walking up to these men and work a miracle, creating in them faith where there was no faith, creating disciples where there was none just moments before.

This is not a story about us, is a story about God and God's ability not only to call us but to create us as people who are able to follow. Able to follow because we cannot take our eyes off of the one who calls us, because he draws our attention like nothing else can. Without him life would not be the same. We believe this is true because we trust the words Jesus spoke; 'that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near.'

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Yet this kingdom of God is not a place somewhere to be found or that we need to somehow await the physical transformation of the earth, because this kingdom is the realm and reign of God right here and now. As Jesus proclaimed these words they were manifested by his very presence on earth.

Jesus calls us to follow and following means many things. It could mean leaving everything behind, but it could also mean staying home and looking at the world in a whole new way. It might mean doing the same old things but in a new way or with added meaning. It might mean looking at the ways in which we spend our money. It might mean working less so others might work more. It might mean taking time to enjoy family or friends so that all feel welcomed and loved.

How you are called to come and to follow will vary from person to person. There will be those times in life when the call is strong and there will be no doubt as to what God is calling you to do. Other times it will be that small quiet voice that prompts you to make that phone call or write that note. Most importantly it is not about what we are called to do or how wonderfully we have completed the task. For the miracle is that the God who called us can be counted on to create us as people who are able to follow. To know that we will be called again and again to come and follow the Savior; for the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael