

“Everything?”

(Luke 5:1-11)

Fumes of frustration swirled around Simon as he picked bits of seaweed and guppies from his net tossing them into the lake with small splashes. His lower back ached almost as much as his heart that all he had to show for a whole night's work was an empty net. He heard the cacophony of the crowd approaching and felt their presence pushing in, but paid little attention to what all the hubbub was about, until a voice spoke his name. There stood Jesus, the man who had a few days earlier cured his mother-in-law of a fever. And so, when Jesus asked to use his boat, even though exhaustion coursed through every muscle and stress tension sat in his shoulders; Simon figured it was the least he could do. Shoving off from the shore, people were already ankle deep in the water vying for a front row space. Simon pulled the oars into the boat as rippling waves gently rocked the vessel and soon the soothing voice of Jesus seemed to gently rock people's souls. Simon continued to pull a stray piece of this and that from his net and started mending tears and tattered edges. Then, Jesus stared right at him with intensity that Simon felt piecing his awareness. Jesus suggested Simon drop his nets back into the water, the same nets he had just cleaned and washed and repaired, for a catch. Let's be honest, this would be like me suggesting to an accountant to double check his math or a cook to use just a bit more paprika, fishing was not Jesus' area of expertise. I imagine Simon with a sigh thinking, "alright preacher boy, I am sure after a long night of catching nothing, I will magically find my nets full..." but no sooner does Simon cast the net, than fish seem determine to find a way in, even when there is no room left. Exhausted and elated at the same time Simon tries with no success to reel the nets into the boat; others come to help out, dumping the fish into the boat so that it began to overflow, eerily creaked, almost sank, with fish. Simon fell to his knees...up to his waist in fish and I don't imagine there is any possible way that could be pleasant, and proclaimed that he can't stand being that close to the sacred. "Do not be afraid," Jesus echoed the angels who heralded his birth to the shepherds, from now on you'll reach out to people." And they left everything and followed him.

Really? They really left everything, it seems so implausible. Leave behind family and home and jobs; security and what is known for what is unknown and uncertain? And how exactly did Mrs. Simon take that one? Slipping on Simon's sandals this morning, I can image in my own life the conversation going something like, "Gina, I am going to follow this itinerant rabbi. There is no pay, no retirement benefits, no health insurance, really this guy Jesus doesn't do budgets. I don't know exactly when I'll be back either. I hope things go well for you and the kids while I am away, I'll be praying for you. I think I'll be catching people, pretty clever play on words for a fisherman, huh?"

I'll let your imaginations fill in any number of possible responses. This sounds irrational and incomprehensible. And so, maybe Simon, James and John were Jesus friends prior to the invitation to join him. Or maybe, friends, we are so far removed from the Jewish culture of the day that it is difficult to wrap our minds around what an amazing honor it was to be called by a rabbi, invited by a respected rabbi who could preach and heal and touched people's souls, to go and follow. That's what rabbis did, the best and brightest came to live with them, study along side them, it was better than getting into Harvard or being asked to study under YoYo Ma. To be invited to follow a rabbi was an indescribable gift.¹ It was not

¹ Much of the information about rabbi-student calling is gleaned from Rob Bell's video, *Dust*

as unusual as it sounds to our modern sentiments to drop everything to follow a religious leader. In fact, it was a desire held in the hearts of many faithful folks who did not get chosen at the time of their barmitzvas; and ended up feeling kind of like the kid who got left on the sideline as captains picked their kickball teams at recess.

Now, here is Simon, James and John invited to follow, they feel accepted and recognized that they might have something to offer Jesus who had been roaming around the countryside preaching and teaching and healing and creating a frenzy of buzz and bringing crowds with him. Simon, James and John were called to be disciples. Whatever that word, disciple, means to you; I struggle trying to find words that even come close to capturing what it would have felt like to sit with Jesus, pray with Jesus, laugh with Jesus, eat with Jesus, and then trying to translate that faithful invitation into an experience here and now. And so, we end up talking about budgets and buildings and programs and pastor's sabbaticals; and sometimes these topics hint at what all that might have to do with being disciples, living as disciples, following the Way today. But what does the call of the first three disciples tell us about what it means to try to carry on that word or begin to translate what it means to live as a disciple today?

I sense two responses that stay with me from Simon and John and James' response. First, being a disciple is about being in community, journeying side by side. Simon, John and James were partners in the fishing business; they knew each other, but I suspect that as they began to follow Jesus there were new insights awoken, they discovered something deeper about each other living side by side. Being in community means we strive to connect in intentional, loving, and pray-woven ways. I think back to the prayers I heard last week during the healing service. I think back to thank you notes people send or thank yous I overhear at meetings. I think back to moments when we gather around a lit candle and pray. I think back just a few moments ago when you sang, "Joyful, Joyful" with gusto; I am wearing off or wearing you down. I give thanks that we are trying to be a faithful community with each other, side by side, sharing love. Now, we don't always get it right. I speak without really thinking or we find ourselves unable to try something new, clinging to what is known. But, we are doing so together, seeking to build community with God's grace and love to the best of our human response.

Being a disciple is about community, but it is also (secondly) about being in the present. Simon, James and John set down their nets. The net is a powerful image of how they saw themselves, thought of themselves, defined themselves in the past. But in order to be a disciple, they had to set down their nets and leap fully into the present moment. What nets, friends, do we need to set down in 2010? What stray pieces of seaweed do we need to stop plucking at so that we might move on to another place and to other folks who we are called to minister alongside? It's not easy. We know our nets, love them, they are our nets. But, Simon, James and John can't take the nets with them. Often times moving into God's future, trusting in God's grace to meet us and lead us, means we need to let go of the things we cling so tightly to our knuckles have turned white. What in our Sunday morning worship has become a net? What in our life together has the ability to get us twisted and knotted and feeling trapped? Being in the present doesn't mean that we forget the past. Simon, James and John, I think, always remembered they were fishermen; but they did not allow that to confine or define them. They stay present and open and responsive to God's call in their lives.

On this Annual Meeting Sunday, it's my prayer that we will sense the sacred stirring in us as we indulge in the sweet taste of chocolate, I mean if this moment doesn't bind us together, what will? It is my prayer that we will keep finding ways to set aside nets in our ministry to follow God's beckoning. It is my prayer that we will find ways to participate fully alongside each other in the ministry of this church. It is my prayer that we will strive to challenge ourselves to go out of these four walls and share God's presence in real ways letting people know that this is place where folks can find community and love right here and now.

So may you stay present to the God who moves in our midst and is still calling to us. May you find the courage you need to set down your nets and may our church together find the same strength. May you keep connecting, keep loving radically, and keep sharing God's grace and peace this day and for countless days to come. Thanks be to God. And thank you, friends, for the joy and privilege of being a disciple with you right now in this wonderful, faithful, and loving community.

And all the people said with full voice, "Amen."