

“Called From Their Nets”

Mark 1:14-20

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As I watched the coverage of the Inauguration on Tuesday, I found myself captivated by the television camera person. We'd get a wide-angle view of the Mall with two million people; a veritable sea of humanity. Then there'd be a zoom-in-lens so close we could taste the saltiness of the tears streaming down one woman's face. The camera captured the enormity of the crowd, but also the transformation evident on a single face. I found that very moving. Something almost unnamable was happening in our nation; yet something very namable was happening with each individual citizen.

I took those television camera images with me to the Gospel text for today: Jesus calling the fishermen from their nets. I picture, on the one hand, a mass of industrious people by the seashore: some fishing, some mending nets, some baiting hooks, some filleting tilapia, some stirring the fish chowder. But then I also picture the zoom-in close up; each face distinctive, each face revealing a hungering, a hungering for something more, something more satisfying than feeding the hunger of the belly.

Looking at this Gospel text through the zoom-in lens, I see that discipleship, ultimately, is a personal matter. It's something I choose not because my father did or my mother did, but because discipleship chose me. Somehow this idea of choosing to live for the sake of unconditional love gets a hold of us one at a time, lays a claim on us, and there is no turning back, no getting lost in the crowd.

A lot of books have been written to address the question of how anyone in his or her right mind could just drop their nets, walk away from their livelihood to go traipsing off with the carpenter's son.

I'd like to think this is not such a complicated matter as to require a whole library of books. I am one of those hopeless romantics who believes in the possibility of love at first sight. I've known lots of couples who met on a blind date and just knew from the get-go that this is the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. It's a possibility!

I remember asking Sam how he ever came to choose Economics as a college major. I had him pegged for English or maybe Religious Studies! He said he arrived at Elon College and was instantly drawn to the Economics faculty. They were scholars he instinctively knew he needed to spend four years getting to know, absorbing from them as much as he could.

Another college kid called home one night wanting to know if I had ever heard of Stuart Dybek and would I take the time to read a short story called The Death of the Right Fielder. I found it in the library. I read it, then I read the next one and the next one, and now I've read every word Stuart Dybek ever published.

And so it goes! Frankly, I love the thought of being swept off my feet, captivated by a truth, bowled over by a philosophy, carried away by an invitation I can't turn down. I know there's a certain potential danger in being caught up in a charismatic movement. History is full of those tragedies. But I'd like to believe it could happen in ways that are life-giving, sacred and holy, in ways that are of God.

Jesus said to Simon and Andrew, to James and John: ‘follow me and I will help you find the kind of meaning that makes life worth living.’

He said to them in effect, ‘If you think fishing is a pretty cool thing to do, follow me and I’ll teach you to love your neighbor as you have never imagined! Follow me and I’ll show you the difference it makes when we take the risk of loving the enemy. Follow me and I’ll turn your world upside down introducing you to love’s redeeming power.’

These four fishermen were like me reading *The Death of the Right Fielder*. They heard the invitation, they took a leap, and they decided to drink in all of what their ears could hear and their eyes could see and their hearts could feel.

There are a number of stories to which one might point saying, ‘There! That’s where Christianity was born. That was the moment. That was the occasion. Some would point to the manger in Bethlehem; some to the Cross; others to the Resurrection. The calling of the fishermen from their nets is in that category of stories that hint at where it all began.

When we were kids, the one magazine we all anticipated reading every week was *Sports Illustrated*. I’d turn immediately to the next to last page where they featured a column called “Faces in the Crowd.” Of all the amateur athletes in the country, they’d lift up one unheralded volleyball spiker and tell her story, or one horseshoe pitcher or one pole vaulter or one softball slugger. Every reader kept thinking, ‘if I subscribe long enough, maybe they’ll print my story. After all, no one hits a tennis ball like I do.’ *Faces in the Crowd*.

That's what we all saw on Inauguration Day! We saw the faces in the crowd. We saw the face of a man who had grown up with two water fountains, one for colored people and one for whites.

We saw the face of a woman whose great grandmother had been born into slavery. We saw the face of a man who maybe had never been to a dentist. We saw the face of a woman hoisting her child up high so she could witness the dawning of a new day.

I took all that with me to the text from Mark's Gospel and I began to see each face in the crowd there in the fishing village. There was Peter, a young man, impetuous, extroverted, the one who spoke before he thought about what he wanted to say, and then regretted what he had said.

There was Andrew, the prodigal sibling, the one who had squandered his inheritance, the one in need of forgiveness but afraid to ask.

There was James, the one awkward in social settings, always putting his foot into his mouth, saying the wrong thing and the wrong time.

There was John, the one who thought he knew it all, thought so highly of himself that others had a hard time warming up to him.

I saw that each was a face in the crowd; each was a face revealing a hunger; each a face responding to Christ's invitation to come and see what life is like when it's love that rules the heart, when it's love that sets the agenda, when it's love that informs every decision, when it's love that matters most of all.

In the community of faith, no one's face gets lost in the crowd. Everyone matters.

One is called to be a visitor to shut-ins.
One is called to be a link in a prayer chain.
One is called to sing in the alto section.
One is called to teach in the church school.
One is called to organize a feeding ministry.
One is called to knit a prayer shawl.
One is called to advise a middle school youth group.
One is called to invest wisely our monetary resources.
One is called to be the bearer of our sacred story.

Discipleship: I've come to see that it is a personal matter lived out in a public arena. On this Annual Meeting Sunday, I am...in the greatest of hope, amen!