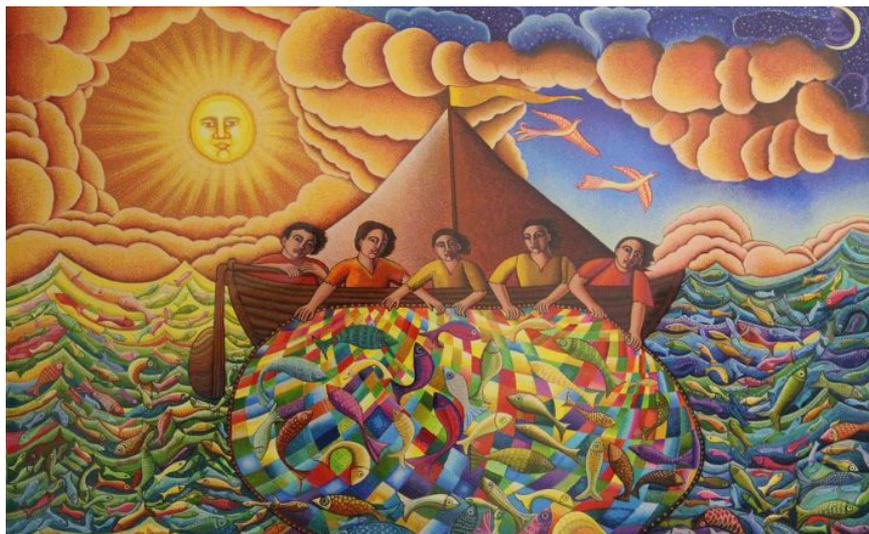


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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FOLLOW THE CALL

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 6, 2022

ISAIAH 6:1-6 | PSALM 138

I CORINTHIANS 15:1-11 | LUKE 5:1-11

Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus had a house in Capernaum, the economic center of Galilee. For Mark, it seems important that we get the sense that Jesus left home, to make his own home. In Luke we get a few more hints that is quite likely, that in that process of leaving his village and going to the big city, Jesus met Peter, Andrew, James and John and knew them for some time before this fateful morning by the lake.

If you think about it, this is the universal human vocation, or calling. One leaves father and mother, maybe not physically, but certainly emotionally and spiritually, and does - whatever. When we think of calling or vocation we think of obvious ways a life is oriented. Getting married. Having children. Leaving home and making a new home. Then there is making a living. The signs of a vocation or calling are professional training, A line of work. The way we spend the majority of our time.

Jesus, the carpenter's son, was already doing something different away from his earthly father. He certainly surprised his friends when they heard he had responded to the message of John the Baptist and went to the Jordan to be baptized. They may have been more surprised, after hearing that John had been thrown in prison, that Jesus picked up right where John had left off. Many a day before that day, they had sat in their boats and his voice carried across the water. Walking up and down the shore, Jesus called out to whomever would listen, to change their minds. To turn and go another way. What could come of that?

Then one morning, they were annoyed to see a crowd pressing in on Jesus in the same place they were coming to land their boats after a long night's outing, empty-handed, exhausted, and determined to wash their nets even if they might disturb the preacher. Jesus had that way. He looked over. Nodded. And got them all back into the boat so that he could get a little breathing room from the crowd as he taught them from the shallows.

What happened next, as they say, is history. What happens next is every Christian's history. The voice of Jesus directs us beyond ourselves, into deep waters, and asks us to do something we don't necessarily understand. And, in his presence, we suddenly can see a reality that Jesus constantly pointed to in his words and deeds - the kingdom of God. We end up falling on our knees and begging forgiveness for our ignorance and disbelief.

Just like the prophet Isaiah did when he trembled before the flying snakes as they thundered: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord! Just as the apostle Paul did when he finally understood some measure of what it meant that God saved a self righteous murderer: By the grace of God, I am what I am!

We may be sitting here, today, hard pressed to remember those moments. But follow the traces. You get up each day and hear your heart beating and become aware of the next breath you will take - and you thank him for making it to this day. You go out your house with a list of things to do. It may or may not matter how successful you are. You come home and say grace at meal time. You give thanks for the three things could have gone better and the three things that comforted your heart. The kingdom is near.

The kingdom of God is right around the corner because you are doing the only thing that really defines a Christian - you are following Jesus. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Mary have mercy on me, a sinner. Just saying the Jesus prayer puts us in a place to listen for his footsteps, to pick up the path.

Think of the times you have been asked to go beyond yourself, to give yourself to something greater, to change how you think and feel for the sake of another. That is what it means to die and rise with Christ, to follow in his way, so that others can experience the blessing.

This story of how Peter, Andrew, James and John are shocked into to leave their nets, leaving behind their way of making a living, is certainly not about Jesus calling them to some religious vocation. Sometimes to use the word vocation kills the meaning of God's call in our life, it covers up the real joy of this story. The new calling is to the trust in God's provision and the abundant life discovered in the overflowing nets - for everyone.

Therefore, to become fishers of people really is the point. It is, as the word suggests in Greek, to take people alive, to rescue them, to make sure they too can participate in the blessing. Peter, Andrew, James and John were doing fine, but now they have come out even more alive, ready to share what the nets have drawn from the depths of the sea.

Over the years, I have come to believe that the most powerful prayer on the street, the most powerful prayer two beggars looking for food can pray, is bless me Lord so that I can be a blessing today to my friend right here next to me. Bless me Lord with a dry place to sleep, a job, with my addiction, with someone to walk with me as I face my responsibilities, so that I can be a blessing to someone else today.

So don't worry what your calling is. Don't even say to yourself that my calling is every Christian's calling to follow Christ. It's simpler than that. Follow him, where and when he leads, and he will show you how to go deeper, to risk in love, to trust in the kingdom, to be a blessing to others. And how it is that we are rescued by one another along the way.

When we follow Christ, we leave other things behind, and we discover our calling.