

“I Choose You”

Polo First United Methodist Church
Polo, IL

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Mark 1:14-20

January 15, 2012 (2nd after Epiphany)

Prayer: Living God, help us to hear your Word that we may truly understand; that, in understanding, we may believe; and in believing, we may follow your way in all faithfulness, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do. Amen.

Where we pick up this story we find Jesus roaming around Galilee, in fact he's on this beach somewhere around there, and he sees these fishermen named Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Judging by their names they were pretty run of the mill people. Throw in the fact that they were fisherman and we're almost assured that they were normal guys doing the family business just trying to earn a buck.

And Jesus walks up to them, and starts talking. Now, I'm guessing that they didn't know who Jesus was from Adam. But who knows, maybe they had seen him around before, or maybe they had heard whispers about some of the stuff he had been saying. Who's to say. And we really don't know whether Jesus had ever seen them around before either. Maybe the word around town was that these sets of brothers were real hard-workers, real quality guys, so Jesus decided to go see them for himself. Or maybe Jesus didn't know them at all, he just happened to be walking on that particular beach on that particular day when these fisherman were working and it was all a big coincidence.

Either way Jesus comes up to them, and according to our story he immediately asks them to follow him. That always seemed a little strange to me. Presumably Jesus didn't know them, and they didn't know Jesus. You would think he would start with a little small talk or something, talk about the weather or ask how the fish were biting today. At least he should have introduced himself and asked them for their names too. But that's not what our story says, it makes it sound like Jesus jumped right in and asked these complete strangers to come follow him. Probably the most important question they had ever been asked.

And that's not all. Maybe even the stranger thing of this story is that these guys don't even hesitate. They look at Jesus, look at each other, look down to the nets, back to Jesus and they say, "Alright, where are we going?" They drop their nets and they follow him.

I don't know if I'd do that. I'm not really one for spontaneously following strangers to God knows where, especially not a stranger who doesn't even have the decency to talk to me about the weather or tell me his name first. No, I like to be in control. To have things planned out.

But that's me, maybe you wouldn't have thought twice about dropping your nets just like these guys did. But I get the feeling that most people probably wouldn't do it.

So if that's true, then what the heck is going on here? I mean, what got into these guys to do this? To all of a sudden drop everything and follow this stranger.

When Jesus asks them to follow him, he didn't mean for them to just come along for a little while and have some fun and then get back to everything else. Jesus didn't ask them to just come along on the weekends and that would be good enough. And he wasn't giving them a task to fit into their already busy schedules, something they could pencil in on Mondays and Wednesdays and Sunday mornings. No, Jesus says in effect "This is going to change your whole life, if you follow me. You can't be the same person if you do this."

And so they follow. We're talking about them leaving everything that they have ever known, to set out with this stranger into the unknown. They don't know where they are going, they don't know how long this following is going to take, and what it is going to require of them, but they follow anyway. They're leaving their families, the units of life which have made them who they are so that they could follow Jesus who says he will give them a new identity. They drop their nets and leave their boats, their sources of income and security, and they're setting out risking everything to follow this man. Their safe and protected lives are going to be no longer. It's an understatement to say that this would take a boatload of courage and a whole heckuva lot of risk.

But they do it. Why?

Would you do it? Leave the comfort of the things around you to step out into the unknown, to take this leap of faith, to expose yourself to these risks, to follow Jesus? Would you leave your families? Your homes? Your jobs? Your security?

"These fishermen must not have been very emotionally tied to these things," someone might say, "if they were able to just drop everything and leave." To those people I would say, come on! We're talking about their families, and the jobs that their families have had for generations. I think they were emotionally invested in these things. Have someone come up to you and tell you that you're not emotionally invested in your family or your way of life, and see how you respond to them. So it seems like what was going on here was deeper than emotions.

"Well then, these fisherman must have been crazy," someone else might say, "they obviously didn't weigh the rational side of what they were doing." To those people I would say, you're probably right, they must have been a bit crazy. But maybe that's what it takes for someone to follow Jesus, all rational thinking takes a back seat when they see this man come up to them and offer them a new life.

But didn't we already know that? I mean this whole story reeks of a lack of logic. I mean let's look at this again... Jesus didn't know who these guys were. They were just normal fishermen,

doing the family business, not good enough to be anything else. And Jesus takes a look at them and says “I choose you.” I choose you to follow me. To come alongside and learn from me. Because I think you are the ones who can make a difference in this world. I think you’ll be able to do awesome things in my name. You’ll be able to teach and heal and baptize and preach.

“But Jesus,” we might say, “they’re just regular guys. Surely you could have found someone more qualified somewhere else. It’s not like you have to pick the first guys with a pulse that you meet.”

And Jesus says, “I know.” But I choose you. I don’t care who you were before. I don’t care what you have done or haven’t done. I don’t care about how you dress or where you live. I don’t care if you’re qualified. I don’t care if you’re good looking. I don’t care if you’re educated. I don’t care if you’re young or old. I don’t care about any of that stuff. None of that stuff matters, because I choose you. And I’m not doing this on a whim. Just because I think it will be nice. I know you can be something great. So, Jesus says, will you follow me?

And when someone comes up to you and says that, how can you refuse? To be approved of. To be accepted. To be loved. For exactly who you are. How do you not follow a guy who sees you like that? Isn’t that what we all want, to be unconditionally loved, to be accepted for who we are, to be seen as someone more than just our past or our present, or our appearance or our job. To be seen not for who you were or for who you are, but for who you can be.

If I was one of those fishermen I think that would be the only thing that would get me to drop those nets and to follow him.

Amen.