

“Strength for the Journey”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, January 21, 2018

Mark 1

As they worked on their boats, as they fished in the Sea of Galilee, the call that Simon and Andrew, and James and John heard on that day, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people, reached way down into their hearts and caused the nets to fall from their hands. Is something that we only read about?

Have *you* heard the call? And can things truly fall from your hands, like the fishing nets in the hands of those men on the beach, in a similar life-changing moment?

Some speculate that the fishermen had perhaps heard Jesus speaking earlier in the day or week and were already smitten by his message, perhaps thinking his words over as their hands flashed over the nets as they repaired this hole or that tear.

Or perhaps Jesus stepped into their lives like lightening, coming out of nowhere and changing everything.

“And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Not after they thought about it, not after they talked it over with each other, not after they finished cleaning out their nets, folding them and placing them back in the boat, not after retrieving their belongings from the boat off shore. No not after anything. They just went. Immediately.

If Jesus were here in this pulpit right now and said the words, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”, not many would immediately leave your pew and follow him out the door and down Church Street... without first thinking about it, talking it over with your family, getting ‘your house’ in order, telling your boss at work, packing a suitcase, not forgetting your phone charger, and getting some dollars from the bank.

Of course we do *demand* things immediately. We demand service. We demand a response. We demand an answer. We demand the stoplight to turn green. The line to move forward. Immediacy is very much part of our lives, but only when we’re the one demanding it.

So when does our ‘Yes’ to God’s call come into the picture, a ‘Yes’, like Simon’s and Peter’s?

Sitting with a cup of tea, looking out the window and being open to God isn’t necessarily responding to a call. It *is* opening ourselves to God, as Sunday morning worship is. But the call happens when something moves us to change, to do, to be, to follow.

Anna Murdock, an online colleague wrote about the disciples at the beach that day. “Dropping our nets to follow Jesus isn’t the miracle of the moment..... The miracle is God

looking our way and saying, “I will work through you.” And with an immediacy that has never been your nature, you drop your nets.”

I clearly remember when I heard those words to me, “Follow me”. And it came not in a quiet moment by a window but in the midst of a church service. And I dropped the fish net. Such things really do happen in this world.

But the dropping of the net took a couple of years for me – as I went to Emmanuel College and went through countless Conference interviews. And sometimes I put a question mark beside that call. How can I possibly do it? There’s so much to this.

I remember words of advice from the retired ministers on the weekend I was ordained by Toronto Conference – ‘Never put a question mark where God puts a period.’

It is a tendency of ours to second guess God when it comes to being ‘called’. Joyce Rupp caught this in her poem, “Take Nothing for the Journey” – this is the last stanza:

I think of all the excuses and reasons
we can give for not serving and giving:
No time, no talent, no knowledge,
no energy, no assured results.
[But you, Jesus] say, “Take nothing.
Don’t worry about your inadequacies.
I will provide for you.
Go! Just go! Go with my power.¹

So what brings you to church? For I consider being at worship on a Sunday, your response to a call that started somewhere in your life. We can each think back and find out where it all started, this coming to church. And our answers will come from a deep place within us.

Jesus calls you, yes. But to what. To be kind to your neighbour? To reach out to others in the brokenness of this? To be God’s hope in a world that seems overwhelmed by hopelessness?

Over the last two years, our leadership team has been reading John Pentland’s 2015 book ‘Fishing Tips – How Curiosity Transformed a Community of Faith’. John begins his book with this quote,

“Community cannot feed for long on itself; it can only flourish where always the boundaries are giving way to the coming of others from beyond them – unknown and undiscovered brothers [and sisters].²

¹ Joyce Rupp, *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 149

² John Pentland, *Fishing Tips*, xi.

There are others who are just hearing a call in their lives now – a call to explore this Christian faith, a call to find spirituality, a call to make a difference in this world by reaching out to others in need.

And these ‘searchers’ are possibly looking for a church to help them in this journey of answering that call.

As a church community, we’ve been deepening our understanding of what ‘creating community for all’ means, in how to provide a place where belonging can be experienced by all.

Stouffville United Church is answering a *call* to be welcoming and caring of these ‘unknown and undiscovered brothers and sisters’ as John Pentland called them.

Retired United Church minister, Nancy Hardy, writes about her experience of moving to a new town and beginning to look for a new church. A friend asked her, ‘What are you looking for?’ And she answered, “After considerable reflection, I realized that my search wasn’t necessarily about great preaching or highly professional music. I was looking for relationships. I was looking for a place I could call home: a place where people knew my name and cared about me; where I was welcomed at Christ’s table and felt part of a congregation that welcomed and included everyone, regardless of colour, race, sexual orientation, or age.”³

And Stouffville United Church, you *can* be that place where “boundaries are giving way to the coming of others from beyond them”, where someone searching for a church home can find welcome and relationship and belonging, where together we are working on what ‘answering this call’ means in our lives and in the world.

For here, everyone belongs.

For here, there is community for all.

And it is here, that we live into the words we’ve heard, ‘Follow me’.

Amen.

³ Nancy E. Hardy, *Singing a Song of Faith*, p. 94