

Sermon: Fisher of Men
Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: January 23rd, 2011

There's no indication at least in the Gospel of Matthew that the disciples even knew who this man was calling to them from the seashore. All he said was "come, follow me." And the gospel says "at once they dropped their nets and followed him." Peter and Andrew were out fishing with their father Zebedee and when they left, they left their father high and dry, standing there bewildered out in the boat watching them go. Can you imagine how disturbing that must have been to poor Zebedee. I'm sure he taught his boys like we all do not to talk to strangers, much less to follow them when they say to you "hey, follow me." And leaving their father would only be the first of troublesome looking decisions that these boys made because of that stranger. You know not all people were thrilled with Jesus and what he taught. He was considered by many a crazy man and by others as a devil. I imagine that Peter and Andrew and the other disciples could have been easily labeled "brainwashed", so completely did they drop what they were doing and follow when this stranger said "follow". As you get to know the disciples further in the gospel and see how obtuse they were to Jesus' teachings and his purpose and you read of Jesus about ready to pull his hair out in frustration with them, you begin to realize that the only thing that commended them to the important role of "disciple" was the fact that when he called them they followed.

They apparently had little thought about what they were leaving behind, which maybe is part of the requirement for following Jesus. We hear later in the gospel just how important a decisive, no-looking-back approach is to following Jesus when one man responds to Jesus' calling by saying "just let me go back and bury my father before I follow you," – a most reasonable request - and Jesus keeps on walking and says back over his shoulder "no one who puts his hand to plow and turns back is fit for the kingdom of God." Then also there's that tough scene where the man comes up to Jesus and says "I have lived a faithful life and done everything I was supposed to do and more. Still what more do I need to do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says "sell all you have, give the money to the poor and come follow me." All he had and all he'd made for himself and his even upright moral life that he was committed to still somehow *entangled* him so that when the call of something higher came, he was unable to follow it. That's possibly why Jesus headed out to the lake-side and looked

for his disciples among the fishermen rather than the religious leaders in the synagogue or the respected business men of the city or the educated elite of Rome, because he knew who was less likely to be entangled by the nets of this world and Jesus didn't have a whole lot of time to untangle people. He needed followers who could drop what they were doing and follow him; follow him to somewhere...

And that's about all you could say for where exactly they were going. *Somewhere* that couldn't have possibly been even on the radar screens of those fishermen's lives. And funny enough, if it had been on their radar screen, man, they probably wouldn't have followed! It would have been a reasonable question when Jesus said "come, follow me" to say "uhm, to where?" But that seems to be another quality of this whole discipleship thing. Along with a willingness to let go of the past and the life around you to risk something new, is also apparently a willingness to follow without the slightest notion of where you will end up. That's a tough one, especially for those of us who are like the man that Jesus spoke of. You know the one who built all these barns to keep his riches in so that he would be prepared for anything that might come, no surprises – except that is for the surprise that he died that night and all his wealth and savings were for naught! He was one of those people who couldn't hear the call of something higher because it's accompanied by a requirement that you relinquish control over what might be. And even though it is an illusion that we can guarantee anything about the future, many of us still put a lot of time, effort and money into guaranteeing it.

Like the story of that
important business executive who boarded the
New-Orleans-to-Washington train one night? He was a heavy
sleeper and he needed to be awakened in order to get
off the train in Atlanta at about five o'clock in the
morning. He had a very important business engagement
there so he found a porter and told him, "I want you
to awaken me in order that I might get off the train
at five o'clock in the morning. Now I'm a heavy
sleeper," he said. "It doesn't matter how much I fret
and fuss and fume or what I do to you--I have to get
off the train in Atlanta. If you have to remove me
bodily," he said, "you get me off that train in
Atlanta!"

"Well, the next morning he awakened about 9 o'clock,
having slept all night and having missed Atlanta,

found that he was speeding toward Washington. He located the porter and really poured it on with all sorts of abusive language, almost attacking the poor guy bodily. After he stomped off the train, someone said to the porter, "How could you stand there and take that kind of talk from that man?" The porter said, rather bewildered, "That ain't nothing! You should've heard that guy I put off in Atlanta!"

We have less control over our lives than many of us imagine we do. A great spiritual question, though, is how invested are we in the illusion of our control and does that investment keep us stuck or trapped or asleep when we need to be wide awake. When the call of Christ, the call of something higher, does come will we be conscious enough to get off the freight train of our lives as we know them now barreling down the tracks.

Peter and Andrew, James and John, were obviously wide awake when that great Conductor named Jesus called out to them from the shore that this was their stop. They dropped their nets and ran to catch up with him. They didn't even think about what they were leaving behind nor about where they were going. Something about the man's voice, something in his eyes awakened them to the moment and whatever chains they felt from their past, whatever dreams they had for their future up to that point, were dissolved into the love they felt for him. Whatever pains from their past, whatever hopes for their future became inconsequential compared to the life they felt raging through their veins in his presence. Never had they felt so alive. Never had they felt life was so meaningful until that day when they heard the voice say "come, follow me." Of course they would go anywhere with this man! Of course they give up everything for this man's vision of the world. Even their probable death was irrelevant to the immensity of life and love and passion that they were experiencing. Can you imagine? Even their own physical safety and well-being paled in comparison to the abundant life that was being offered them.

But there was Poor Zebedee still out in the boat wondering what just happened as he finally loses sight of his sons over the hill. Poor Zebedee still trying to figure out who in the world that man was who just called out to them and took his sons and where they thought were going and how he was going to get the work done that needed doing and if he too might want to just drop everything and follow that man. But already it was getting late, he had to figure a way to get those nets home by himself....