

SERMON: *“From ‘Go away’ ... to ‘Leaving everything.’”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, February 6, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

Today’s Luke reading displays the life-altering power of God’s word – spoken/heard/followed – to call/change lives. Having left the dust/disaffection of His ‘hometown’/Nazareth behind; Jesus is now beside the ‘lake of Gennesaret’/Sea of Galilee(north shore/likely east of Capernaum), teaching/proclaiming God’s Word/Good News about the coming kingdom/freedom – grace/salvation. Obviously, time has passed, as word about Jesus was spreading/His reputation was growing, (His message attracted crowds of desperate/hopeful people) – and we’re told that the *“crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God;”* pushing Him toward the water’s edge. But, the shoreline is also a busy/crowded work zone, crowded with beached boats, sails/lines/nets drying in the sun /fishermen hard at work. It’s a place where Simon Peter/Andrew, James/John have been working for most of their lives – as their fathers/grandfathers/great-grandfathers did before them. The crowd/fishermen seem at odds to each other – in fact they seem likely to be antagonistic toward each other – but, in truth, both were desperate for relief from their hard scrabble/fraught/thwarted lives: in the middle/water’s edge is Jesus who sees two boats/and asks Simon Peter(others) to *“put out”* from the shore.

[Lake Gennesaret(Grk translation)/Sea of Galilee:several times – swim/sailed/walked beside(not on!):not a “Sea” in terms of size! 53K’s in circumference/Lake Simcoe = 303K’s! 21K’s long/13K’s wide only 141 feet deep/Largest fresh water lake in Middle-east/Israel! Abundant fish life-St. Peter’s fish/Talapia – Magdela 1st C salted/pickled fish exporter to Roman Empire! Thriving fishing industry – for centuries/generations! Boats/25-30’/wood(scraps/salvage), wide/flat-bottomed/shallow (stability/holding fish!)]

And this is how God – the almighty/powerful/alpha-omega/creator of worlds/universes/us – often chooses to meet us at our level/where we are/need Him to be. Whether it is an evening stroll in Eden/the “still small voice” of the Elijah’s encounter/Moses’ voice in a burning bush, or the quiet/questioning voice that calls to Isaiah(*“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”*)in our OT reading; God – as Jesus does on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – enters our lives with the openness of an inviting conversation. Here, Jesus – in need of a space from the crowd – encounters Simon-Peter, and initiates the relationship by asking a favour/aid/assistance/help, an act of kindness/goodwill/service: seemingly testing Simon-Peter’s openness to grace.

There’s something reassuring about the way Jesus approached Simon-Peter. Jesus initiates – turning this seemingly insignificant/causal meeting into transformational moment – by taking a risk in seeking Simon-Peter’s help. Every meaningful relationship starts with a risk:Simon-Peter’s receptive response (albeit grudgingly/unknowingly) signals his willingness to respond to Jesus’ invitation/call. What Luke shows us in this moment is the fulfillment of the cosmic plan/purpose of Jesus’ risking eternity to be incarnated/come to be-with us/as-one of us/to die as us/save us: Jesus risked crossing the universe – and being rejected(Nazareth) by those He came to save. There’s risk in Simon-Peter’s response, that without motive/expectations/agenda, moved him beyond his safety/comfort zone/status-quo. By responding faithfully/putting his faith into action, Simon-Peter puts down his nets, puts out to sea, listens to Jesus’/God’s Word, and is changed.

Our encounters with God are frightening – and why wouldn’t they be! God is both unimaginable/beyond description/understanding, and yet intimate/(LW:*“in the details”*) and

present/relatable. After the fire/smoke show of the singing multi-limbed/headed Seraphs proclaiming God's glory/might – Isaiah, frightened for his life in the presence of God, falls to his knees crying *“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”* This is the sheer fear of the unknown/panic of knowing how unworthy he is to even be there: it's also the *“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* of Simon Peter's sudden realization: And it's our cry of fear/recognition/wonder/hope when we encounter Jesus/God – it's mine/realize I'm in need of God's grace!

Friends, life is mostly lived in the waiting for something to happen. For Simon-Peter it happened/he realized that what he experienced – the presence/Word of God – is not found in our 'safe'/comfortable/known/controlled ways/places, but are experienced by submission/submitting ourselves to God. It's clear by Simon-Peter's response that this happened – and it put his life in a new light, setting off a process of realization/acknowledgment/transformation resulting in his fearful confession and plea. Again, Jesus' response is telling: rather than dismissing him, Jesus offers Simon-Peter/us/you/me grace by further revealing to him the greater/eternal potential that God intended for him/me/you/each of us by freeing us from our nets and taking up our role in the work of God.

[Names: Important! Identity/define us/make us us. Naming/'ownership' – God created/names us: we're His! Parent: named our children/.... Jesus/God calls us each by name/inviting us to respond to gift of grace/salvation and say (Isaiah) “Here am I”]

This experience of grace changed everything for Simon-Peter/others/us: it gives us a chance to respond/change/to go from “Go Away”/fear of condemnation/death/staying with/on the boat to choosing to “leave everything” for a life forever changed. As we turn toward the table where we remember the risk/sacrifice that our Lord Jesus made for us; let us respond as Simon-Peter did by heeded Jesus'/God's invitation/call by leaving everything/follow he one who won for us so much more! our eternal Amen.