

2019 02 10 – Following Jesus

Luke 5:1-11

How many of you have a favourite hymn? Think about that hymn...sing it in your mind if you can. What is it about that hymn that you love? Is it the music, the rhythm, the energy that it creates or is it the lyrics? For me, it is often the words that matter the most. One of the hymns that we are singing today – our closing hymn – is a favourite for me because of its incredibly beautiful and meaningful words. The lyrics were written by the Iona Community and for me they are a true representation of what “following Jesus” is all about.

The first verse begins with the words, “Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?” The first step in following Jesus is, of course, answering his call. We are all called in different ways. Simon and his partners James and John, had just finished a night of fishing and were sitting on the shore washing their nets. They were going about their daily business, when along came Jesus. Jesus was preaching, as he often did by the shore of Lake Gennesaret (or the Sea of Galilee as we usually call it.) And, no doubt, the fishermen could hear what Jesus was saying as they prepared their nets for the following night.

Simon and his partners probably noticed the crowds getting larger and Jesus moving closer and closer to shore. But imagine their surprise when Jesus stepped into Simon’s boat. Jesus didn’t wait for an invitation, he had a need and Simon’s boat was handy so he just stepped in and then he had the gall to ask Simon to pull the boat out into the lake. The story doesn’t tell us how Simon

responded, whether his mouth was wide open in shock, whether he protested a little before moving the boat or whether he was so honoured by Jesus' presence that he just did as he was asked. All we know is that Simon answered Jesus' first request and allowed his boat to be used as a stage, a podium. The reality is that calls from God usually come without any prompting and at times when they are totally unexpected and often even unwelcome. They come in God's time, not ours.

The hymn continues, "Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?" The second step in any call is the preparation that's required before we can answer it fully. In today's story Jesus finished speaking and then he said to Simon, "Pull out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." This is the first time that we hear Simon speak and he responds, "Rabbi, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing and we know that the fish bite better at night than they do during the day; but if you say so, I'll lower the nets." Simon's not sure that he wants to go out again. Maybe he's just tired, or maybe he really doesn't think there will be any fish, or maybe Jesus is asking him to put his nets deeper than is his usual practice. Maybe Simon is worried about what he's going to find if he goes that deep.

Following Jesus requires us all to go deep, to go deep within ourselves and explore those places that we usually keep hidden from others and sometimes even from ourselves. Following Jesus means doing the work to find out who we really are and to let go of the false identities that we have created for ourselves. To let go of all those masks that we wear because we think that's what others

want to see. In my own call process I had to let go of the mask and security blanket that was my job at IBM. It had provided for me not only my income but also my identity and it actually took a three month leave of absence for me to determine if I could still be me without my job. When we follow Jesus we have to be willing to let go, to change, to transform and to never be the same.

The third line in the song is “Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?” Another key part of following Jesus is vocation. For some people our vocation is the paid work that we do and for others it is our passion or our life outside of our job. Vocation is about doing what God or Jesus has called us to do. Jesus was clear about his own vocation. We’ve been talking about that for the last couple of weeks. Jesus came “to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to those held captive...[and] recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). Jesus is calling us to that same vocation. We are all called to share the good news of God’s love. The Iona Community, the group that wrote this hymn, are Christians from different denominations who have come together with a commitment to “Jesus and his proclamation of a just and generous new order.” Writing and publishing inspiring music is just one of the ways that they follow their call. <https://iona.org.uk/>

But following Jesus, following our call, living our vocation can be a difficult path to walk. In the hymn we are asked, “Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?” Following Jesus can mean going on a whole direction in our lives. It can mean using the power of Spirit in ways that are beyond our comprehension.

When Simon lowered his nets and brought up a huge catch of fish, he was filled

with awe and fell down before Jesus saying, “Leave me, Rabbi, for I am a sinner.” Simon was both afraid of the power that he had witnessed and also filled with a sense of unworthiness. This is a theme that we find throughout the Bible and throughout history. Most of us question God’s sanity when we first hear the call. You’re asking me to do what? I don’t have the experience, the training or the skill to do that work! Why me? Why are you calling me? Fear is a normal response to a call from God.

In today’s story, “Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you’ll fish among humankind.’ “ Obviously Jesus’ words were convincing because Simon and his partners “left everything and followed him.” They left everything, their business, their families, their home, everything that defined who they were in the world and they followed Jesus. What’s helpful for us that we know how Simon’s story ends. We have read ahead, so we know that Simon became Peter, “the rock.” We know that Simon Peter continued to ask lots of stupid questions and make lots of mistakes as he followed Jesus. And we know that eventually Peter became the spiritual leader of all the followers of Jesus. He became the rock on which the Christian church was built. Following Jesus is about moving past our fears and our feelings of inadequacy and taking that first step.

The last line in the opening verse of our hymn goes like this, “will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?” The good news is that following Jesus is not a path that we walk on our own. Peter’s friends James and John, the sons of Zebedee, went with him. Like Peter, we also have people with us on our journey.

They may be family, friends, mentors, or members of this congregation who are also following Jesus.

Finally, we need to remember that it was Jesus who stepped into Peter's boat. The Christ, the Spirit, the Holy Mystery is always with us and is always willing to step in whenever we need support. It is the Spirit that fills us with the strength, the love, the courage and the perseverance that we need to continue on even when we fail, even when we fish all night and our nets are empty.

When we answer God's call, when we follow Jesus, then growing our spiritual lives becomes an even more important aspect of our daily living. As Jesus' life grows in us and we begin to do Jesus' work in the world we also need to be growing our lives in the Spirit. The members of the Iona Community follow a practice of prayer, song, silence and sacrament not that different from our own. Along with Sunday worship, we are called to a daily practice that may include meditation, prayer, yoga, reading, walking or some other activity that connects us with the God that we know, a practice that connects us with the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being. A practice that connects us with Jesus the Christ, the one who asks each one of us, "Will you come and follow me?"