

“But What about Dad in the Boat!”

(Based on Mark 1:14-20)

“As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.”

Now Mark’s gospel is known for its quick and to the point way of telling the story of Jesus. Things happen quickly in Mark. A person is healed immediately. A leper walks right away. Sins are forgiven on the spot. And today it is no different. Calls out to Andrew and Simon who we also know as Peter, to James and John and they leave with Jesus – immediately. In the case of James and John they left their dad in the boat.

Somehow this is important for us to notice. Zebedee is left in the boat with the hired workers. Mark is brief with his words, so why add “and Dad was still in the boat!?”

We are invited to ponder this.

Some of us are bewildered with how James and John could just go. For many of us, we would feel irresponsible if we just left our dad in the boat, or our mom on her own, or left our parents to deal with their limited mobility or their health problems. We just couldn’t leave them without first making sure they were okay and looked after. How could Jesus ask them to just go – leave the farm, to give up the business, to follow their dream? Some of you have known this challenge of hearing a different calling than our dad’s or mom’s or our parents’ dream.

One of the star words this year was the word Vocation. Not vacation which would be a sweet word too. But vocation -- a type of work that you feel you are suited to doing and to which you should give all your time and energy, or the feeling this type of work suits you. Something that suits you. The definition from the Cambridge Dictionary went on to make a distinction between vocation and a job. In the Christian sense of this word vocation, we would translate as calling. What is calling to your soul or your spirit? It may be your job and it may be something else. It speaks to more than what you do but also what you are meant to be. The Vocation star word calls out to ponder what blesses our soul and how do we live that out.

Peter Mansbridge with Mark Bulgutch published a book in 2023 called *How Canada Works*. The book is collection of Canadians telling their story of how they were drawn to the work they do or did. The ones I have read so far told me how an Indigenous chief pulled alongside a grieving boy and how that act of kindness inspired the boy to become chief one day. I have read about a principal in a small town who understand how important graduation is for kids in their town and how the school is more than a school. He doesn’t get caught up in the provincial benchmarks and yet his school still has a 95% graduation rate from high school. There are stories about an air traffic controller, the funeral director, the midwife, the grocer, the lawyer, the tour guide to name a few. People sharing how they came to do the job they do. But maybe more, their calling.

Some of us wonder perhaps if James and John were maybe glad to do something else. They seem to be quick to respond. Maybe even anxious to be somewhere else. Some of us know that

what life is offering us is not taking us in the directions we wish to go. We know that we were made to do something else. Our spirits are restless, and we are looking for another path to bring life meaning and purpose. James and John show us we can say yes to another path. They had the courage to take that path with Jesus.

One of the gifts of Christian community is that we have folks to help us discern and support us on the new paths we take. Sometimes it is the path called grief. Other times it is doing a new thing in our work or life. Sometimes it is the path of brokenness. Sometimes it is a path of changing something for the better. The call of Jesus to be is also a call to find others to walk with us.

Naomi Wingfield (from *Light All Around Me* 2007) shares this poem about the courage to take the next step...

“I Want to Dance”

I want to write a poem.
I want to dance.
The pills, the canes, the dying of my friends
Cement my feet.

I want to paint a flower.
I want to dance.
A hundred pansies in a window box
Lift bright and expectant faces
As young children do.
Small cracks in the cement.

I want to sing a song.
I want to dance.
Summer clouds, a cooling breeze (or perhaps for us a warming one).
A friend comes in.
My sister phones.
My heart is free,
And I can dance.” P. 26

But what about Dad in the boat? I don't know really. It stuck me that dad was fine in the boat. He had his hired workers. The boat was his and it was his calling. His sons? Perhaps Dad knew his sons needed something else in their lives. Perhaps he was wise enough to let them go and discover the life that Jesus was calling them to. Perhaps their dad was waving his hands and saying, “Go”. Perhaps their father's faith was such to see who it was asking his sons to follow him. God was inviting his sons on the adventure of a lifetime. Jesus was asking them to come along.

Could it be that sometimes the things standing in our way of saying yes to God are our notions of what we think others would say or we are seeking some form of approval first? What is our call was to be the bakery owner or the actor, or the Zookeeper? What is our call was to be who God sees us to be – loved and loving, gifted and gifting, able and enabling?

Would we say yes then? Andrew, Simon who also know as Peter, James and John all said yes. Are you ready to say yes too? I think I see Zebedee waving us on – getting going. Jesus is waiting. Amen.

Sermon written by Rev. Bruce Dickson and delivered at Dublin Street United Church, Guelph, ON January 21, 2024. Permission is given for personal use or group study.