

“Well-equipped Disciples”

Luke 5:1-11

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Annual Meeting

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Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

What does it mean for you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

- For you, does it mean *believing* particular things, like we say in the creed every baptism service? “I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth ...”
- Does it mean *feeling* a particular way, like John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, espoused? That our hearts should be “strangely warmed,” as he said, in such a striking way that we can even name the date we were saved?
- Does being a disciple mean *acting* a particular way, through regular mission and service, or regular worship and sacraments, or generous donations to the poor?

At different times in different places, Christians have framed discipleship in different ways. I suspect that among all of us here, we would come up with a wide variety of expressions of discipleship, perhaps depending on whether we grew up in a church, and what our experiences of faith have been over our years. There is no single correct answer; indeed, the correct answer might well be “all of the above.” Head and heart and hands.

But one thing is clear from this passage we read: however discipleship manifests itself, following Jesus isn't a check-the-box endeavor. Being a disciple means being "all in." And the question is: what does *that* look like for us?

Let's start with what it looked like for the first disciples Jesus called. When we studied this passage at Women's Bible Study on Wednesday, I asked them to share their initial reactions. Not surprisingly, the first thing someone said was: "Wow. They left *everything* and followed him?" I think it was Corinne Reichert who said it, and I have to say, she is one of the most humble, generous, down-to-earth Christians I know. And *she* was left dumbfounded at what the disciples did. And all of us nodded in concert.

They left everything and followed him. What an astonishing thing to do. It's hard for most of us to imagine doing something like that: leaving behind our families. Leaving behind our homes. Leaving behind our work. Leaving behind our friends. Leaving everything behind ... it sounds, well, crazy.

He doesn't send them out that minute to be teachers and healers alongside him, or "fishers of people" as he calls them. There's a time of formation for their head and heart and hands.

First, they experience Jesus' teaching: his sermon on the mount, when he teaches the crowds what it means to be truly blessed, not by wealth but by humility ... when he teaches them to love their enemies instead of being consumed by hatred and resentment ... when he teaches them to share what they have and give to the poor, for God has enough for us all. To be a disciple is to have our thinking formed by Jesus' teaching – to propose a contrast between Jesus' philosophy and myriad cultural and religious alternatives. And that's true for us too. We never stop learning and growing in faith ... we never stop having our heads redirected by God's truth.

Second, Jesus' disciples experience his compassion – his heart. They are amazed at his call to the despised tax collector Zaccheus to come down and take him to his home for dinner ... they're astonished by his forgiveness of an adulterous woman who could have been stoned to death for her sins ... they're moved by his welcome of children, who were considered so insignificant in their day ... they're touched by his welcome of outsiders, Gentiles who have no “right” to be included in God's covenant but whom Jesus welcomes anyway. Jesus' first disciples are utterly shaped by Jesus' compassion – and that's true for us too. The day our hearts stop caring is the day our faith grows cold and dies.

Third, Jesus' disciples experience his hands-on mission: he doesn't stay back in a synagogue or school; he doesn't hole himself up in a monastery.

Jesus goes out among the people – rich and poor, powerful and oppressed, Gentile and Jew, sick and healthy, learned and ignorant – and he cares for their practical, embodied, real problems. When he meets the sick, he doesn't turn his back; he heals them - including Simon's own aging mother-in-law, and a Gentile centurion's young son. When the crowds are hungry, he doesn't send them away empty-handed. He turns five loaves and two fish into enough for 5,000. Even when the wedding banquet at Cana runs dry of wine, he doesn't wring his hands. He turns six massive jars of water into wine. Jesus' first followers learn that to be a disciple is to be equipped with Jesus' hands-on, practical care for the world – and that's true for us too. If we turn our back on the world God loves, we've missed the point completely.

Jesus calls us to follow him – to offer our whole selves, head and heart and hands – to be formed into the disciples he needs us to be. He calls us to be shaped into the people God needs us to be, compassionate, generous, resilient and wise.

How does that happen today? Of course, God can use every human experience to shape us. But isn't our church here to help us experience exactly those things today, to shape us as disciples?

- To experience our heads recalibrated with Christ's teaching

- Gathering around a table Wednesday mornings with 40 women diving into scripture and sharing our insights and our lives
- Or thinking deeply about our faith with John Buchanan, our Theologian in Residence, 125 of us challenged by his thoughtful, articulate wisdom
- To experience our hearts transformed with Christ's compassion –
 - Praying in worship every Sunday, as total strangers become like family to us: a child in rehab, or a sister with cancer, or victims of the Zika virus in Brazil, and suddenly we're all God's children together
 - Quietly bringing flowers to a shut-in, or welcoming a Lake Forest College student in for Christmas; counseling as a Stephen Minister or teaching confirmation behind the scenes, reaching out in ways that don't get any "credit" but make a difference in the life of someone who would otherwise be invisible ... and our hearts are softened
- To experience our hands used by God in service
 - Painting a widow's dilapidated house on Work Trip, feeding homeless men breakfast at the crack of dawn at PADS, welcoming strangers at Soup Kitchen with dignity and kindness
 - Volunteering in our own ways, tutoring a child so she won't get left behind, bringing clothes to abused women at Sarah's Circle, raising

money for social service agencies decimated by the state budget impasse.

Head. Heart. Hands. It all matters. It all adds up. And there is nothing that the Lord can't use to transform us ... to transform the world God loves.

One final word about discipleship. Did you notice that Jesus doesn't ask his first disciples to be something that they're not? They're fishermen ... and he calls them to use their best selves in God's service. He calls them to put their core self on the line for God's beloved world: "You've been casting your nets for fish," he tells them. "Now you'll be casting your nets for people. I'm going to use who you are – your best self – for the sake of God's kingdom." May it be so for each of us. May it be so for all of us, who together commit ourselves to follow him. Amen.