**A Joyful Calling**

**Psalm 62:5-12**

**Mark 1:14-20**

 **I have no idea why I share stories like the one I am about to share. I imagine someone with good psychological training could venture a guess. It certainly does nothing to make me look like someone you would wish to have in a leadership role. What’s worse, I think I have told the story before.**

 **I have a friend who is of Polish descent. He loves to tell jokes and unlike me, he remembers quite a few. Many of his jokes have some Polish dimension. My wife Michele and I were over to our friend’s house for dinner. Steve, Lepinski is his last name, said to me, “would you like to see a Polish trailer?” I knew the smart answer was “no thanks”. But, I couldn’t resist so I somewhat hesitantly said “sure.” He said “follow me, I’ll show you.” We were about to make a turn for our second round through the house when it finally dawned on me that I was the Polish trailer.**

 **Our Gospel lesson today tells the story of Jesus calling Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew to leave their nets and become followers, disciples of Jesus. Because of the brevity of Mark’s words it is easy to get the impression that the decision of the disciples to follow Jesus was about as informed as my decision to follow my friend Steve around the house in search of a Polish trailer. Jesus says come and without a second thought they just get up and go, blindly following Jesus around, turning at every corner, never asking questions, just going wherever Jesus goes.**

**There are plenty of people who leave the impression that this is exactly what it means to follow Jesus. You get in behind Jesus, do what you are told, don’t ask questions, conform to all the expectations laid out for you. But is that what Jesus is after when Jesus calls the disciples, when Jesus calls us to become followers? Is Jesus looking for people who will simply do what they are told, who know how to follow rules? Do we dutifully drop what we are doing; make God number 1, even when it makes no sense or is beginning to feel like some bad practical joke? Is this what it means to be called?**

**If you are familiar with Biblical scholar Marcus Borg, you may have heard the sad news that he passed away this past week. Borg was one of the leaders in the more recent scholarship focusing on the humanity of Jesus. One of the first things Borg tells us is that if we want to know who Jesus is, if we want to understand the meaning of Scripture, then we need to read the Bible in context. Without giving attention to Biblical context we can make Jesus and the Bible be pretty much whatever we want it to be and say whatever we want it to say.**

Another Biblical scholar by the name of John Dominic Crossan, a close friend of Borg, goes even further by drawing a distinction between context and matrix. Context for Crossan is like the backdrop we had when our pictures were taken for the directory. You can swap out the scene behind you and it really doesn’t matter. Matrix, says Crossan, puts the setting in conversation with the people and the words. The matrix is essential for understanding the meaning of Jesus life and in our lesson today, what it means to be called.

**Our Gospel from Mark begins with context, or Matrix as Crossan calls it. Here is what Mark says, “**Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,…” **One need not be a Biblical scholar or well versed in the history of the Roman Empire or first century Galilee to get a good feel for the matrix in which Jesus calls disciples.** John, the one who baptized Jesus, the cousin of Jesus, has been arrested because of his outspokenness about the Realm of God. John is arrested. Jesus comes into Galilee proclaiming the Realm of God and with the arrest of John fresh off the press, like another beheading by Isis, Jesus extends a calling to the disciples and to us.

**Apparently, to be called by Jesus, to have awareness that there is something important needed from us, that our lives matter, comes with risk. Whether the risk is large and potentially life threatening as it would become for the disciples or whether that risk is more modest, it is fair to say that without some awareness of risk and uncertainty there is no calling.**

 **I hope Ione does not mind being quoted on her last official Sunday with us. I promise I won’t tell any Polish trailer stories. But, this week as Ione and I emailed back and forth about today’s liturgy, Ione made this comment, “**Putting this last liturgy together feels a little like standing on the edge of a cliff and getting ready to jump. . .” Surely, this is what the disciples must have felt when they decide to leave their boats behind and respond to the calling of Jesus.

 This coming Tuesday our Building Blocks Ministry Team will be meeting to consider the future of Building Blocks Tutorial. Joanne Sylvander, who is the current chair, sent out an email reminder to other ministry members and she included the words from a song entitled Leap of Faith by Ann Reed.

*I walk on a fluid road
Ever changing where it goes
I wrestle my fear
And trusting my heart
That strength will appear
Oh, growing there in the dark

Oh, it is time
I will live out loud and
Open my eyes to the great divide
I’m walking my path
feeling my way
And every step’s a leap of faith.*

The Biblical matrix, the Biblical context of John’s arrest, reminds us at the outset that to be called by God is to face risk and uncertainty. The only way to approach our calling is with a leap of faith. There is nothing about falling Jesus that requires us to leave behind our questions, leave behind the minds we have been given, simply fall in line and follow orders. What Jesus seeks from us as individuals and from us as a community of faith is a trusting heart willing to take risks for the sake of God’s Realm.

# There are two other dimension to this notion of calling that warrant our attention this morning. Presbyterian Minister and author Frederick Buechner, writes about calling in his book A Theological ABC. He says this about calling, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Our story for children of all ages this morning was about the artist Georgia O’Keefe. One of the reasons I chose this particular story is because in Georgia O’Keefe we see someone who listened to her sense of calling. She paid attention to that place where her deepest gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet. Even when others discouraged her for her attentiveness to things that seemed unimportant, Georgia as a young girl already sensed her calling as an artist.

# Too often disciples are pictured as people glumly following Jesus, doing what Jesus tells them, but with no real conviction, passion or sense of calling that is their own. Jesus invites us, encourages us to find our calling by listening to that inner voice saying, follow me. None of us are likely to become famous painters, but all of us have can find that place of joy where our deepest gladness and the worlds hunger meet. Both as individuals and as a community of faith, we know we are responding to the call of God in our lives when we have a sense of joy in the work, the ministry that we do. This is why our Lay Ministry Team is so intentional about inviting people to serve on ministries within the church that feed their souls and give them a sense of joy. If there is no joy, there is no calling.

# Finally, the calling of Jesus, the calling of God, is directly related to participating in building the Realm of God’s love and justice. This is why the Psalmist continues drawing us back to God as the place where our soul waits in silence, the source of our hope, our rock, our salvation, our fortress, our refuge. The Psalmist lays metaphor on top of metaphor on top of metaphor because the Psalmist knows our strong tendency to find our calling, look for our hope and salvation, in things that have no lasting value. “Those of low estate are but a breath,” says the Psalmist, “those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath”.

# You may think you have a calling to purchase a new car, but according to the Psalmist, that is no calling. But, a calling could be having a new car and giving a ride to someone in need. A calling has little to do with our personal ambitions and everything to do with expanding the love and justice of God’s Realm. This is precisely why Mark begins with the warning, “After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God.” The Good News of God puts us on a collision course with values, practices and policies that stand in opposition to God’s love and justice.

# I am sure you notice that Jesus never tells the disciples to give up fishing. Jesus just says use those gifts you have been given and build up on them, become fishers of men and women. Use the talents which are yours and take a risk. If you are a banker, there is no need to quit banking and go into the ministry, just use your gifts for banking in the service of God’s Realm. If you are a teacher, nurse, janitor, accountant, factory worker, farmer whatever the occupation, a student in school, what Jesus wants of you, what God needs from you is that you build upon, expand upon, take risks with the gifts and opportunities you are given to build the Realm of God’s love and justice.

# This, of course, is Ione’s last official Sunday. I say official because we hope someday she may come back as a substitute accompanist. But, today we offer our blessings and fondest wishes for someone who has challenged and blessed us with her gifts and who now ventures out with a new leap of faith. There is nothing stationary about being called by God. It means a readiness and willingness of heart to go wherever the spirit leads.

# I did see a Polish trailer outside and after worship, our annual meeting and Fellowship hour with Ione, if any of you wish to see that Polish trailer, I will be happy to show you.

**Psalm 62:5-12**

***In our first lesson our Psalmist uses a variety of metaphors to speak about the steadfast love of God. Although the Psalmist makes only minimal reference to the alternatives to which we are drawn, he does mention riches. The Psalmist leaves no doubt that the false options we are offered can never compare to the power of God’s love.***

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God. God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before God; who is a refuge for us. Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.
Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O God. For you repay to all according to their work.

**Mark 1:14-20**

***Our first tells the story of Jesus stepping into his own calling by calling disciples to share in proclaiming the Good News. Mark takes note that Jesus extends this call at the very same time John has been arrested for his Realm of God work.***

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 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.