

Aug 18 The Call of the Fisherman

Luke 5:1-11

Adam Hamilton has written a study about the life of the Disciple Peter. Peter is almost always portrayed as a flawed disciple—one who seeks to follow Jesus, yet one who is also confused, afraid, and faltering. Seeing in Peter the human frailties we all have when it comes to discipleship makes him be a favorite for many. He seems more like us, more approachable. Through him, we also find reassurance that Jesus will love and forgive us as he did for Peter.

I believe the Gospel writers were comfortable telling these stories about his missteps because Peter himself told these stories again and again across the last thirty years of his life. These stories help to humanize Peter. Even more, in his willingness to keep trying, to accept forgiveness and to ultimately find great courage and conviction, we see in him a picture of what we might aspire to be when empowered and led by the Spirit. By the time the Gospels were written Peter had been put to death by the Romans for his faith in Christ. It would have been understandable if they had sanitized his story. We often do this with great leaders. We print only the good stuff and ignore the rest. Instead, we see in the Gospels, Peter, warts and all, because the writers understood that he might be flawed but ultimately was a courageous and faithful disciple.

Simon's story begins along the Sea of Galilee, just east of the Jordan River in a town called Bethsaida. Peter's given name was Simon, or Simeon. Our English translators have usually anglicized all biblical names. In the Aramaic spoken in Galilee, he would likely have been called Shimon. Shimon is related to the Hebrew word Shema which means "to hear" It was a very common name in first-century Judaism. There are nine different Simons or Shimons mentioned in the New Testament. Jewish naming conventions typically identify a man also by his father's name and Jesus addressed him at least once as "Simon bar Jonah" or Simon son of Jonah.

We are not sure when Jesus and Simon first met. In the first three Gospels it was along the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. John's Gospel says they met months earlier when Jesus went to hear his cousin John the Baptist preach. In this account, Simon's brother Andrew is identified as a disciple of John and it is he who leads his brother

Simon to meet Jesus. When Jesus meets him he says, “You are Simon but you will be called Cephas,” which is translated Peter, which in Aramaic means rock.

Why did Jesus choose this nickname for Simon? Was it because he was a big man or was it because Jesus could see what Peter would one day become? We don't know. Let's assume it is because Jesus could see the potential, that in this flawed person was something substantial. I believe that Jesus knew that ultimately Peter had the potential to be one of the key people of the new faith following Jesus' resurrection.

If Jesus gives out nicknames because of potential, what nickname would he give you, describing the potential he sees in you? The nickname would not be about the person you are, like when he called James and John the sons of thunder for their explosive personalities, but the person you could become, even now? What nickname would you hope he might choose for you? Would it be “Encourager, Faithful, Forgiver, Lover, Helper?” What nickname might you receive that would point the way forward in your life, the type of person you can strive to grow into? It doesn't mean it will happen without some failings but if flawed Simon could grow into his nickname of the rock you too can grow into what God sees in your life.

In the Gospel of John after this encounter, Jesus heads off into the desert to be tempted. When he emerges from the dessert, he calls his first disciples and Simon Peter was one of them. We learn that Peter was married and lived in Capernaum. It seems that Jesus lived often in the home of Simon Peter's mother-in-law where Peter also lived.

Early in his ministry Jesus asked to use Peter's boat when talking to the crowds. Jesus' strategy was about more than finding the best spot to preach. He wanted to invite Simon Peter's help. The best way to build a relationship is to ask for help. Imagine how Simon felt that morning helping Jesus! Jesus asks us still to give our time, and sometimes to borrow our stuff, in order to accomplish his work. How does it feel to know Jesus needs you? In what ways can you invite others to help you do the work so they too can learn and grow and feel that feeling of being needed?

I think of our community dinner. We often have new people volunteer to help. The first time they are unsure of what to do but are partnered with someone more experienced. It is fun to watch them as they get into the swing of things. They feel needed, they have made a difference and often they are back the next month. Jesus needs you!

After preaching, Jesus tells Peter to row out farther into the deep water and drop his nets for a catch. Peter hesitated. They had worked hard all night and got nothing. The nets were clean and dry. They were tired. He was a fisherman and Jesus a carpenter. You don't catch fish at this time of the day. Yet, he did it because Jesus asked him to. It was a reluctant obedience.

Sometimes the most important things in our lives happen when Jesus interrupts what we are doing with a nudge and we reluctantly do it. In Peter's case he received, as a gift, a huge haul of fish. It leaves Peter awestruck. Jesus says, "Don't be afraid and now you are going to fish for people." When we follow Jesus, it can be scary. Peter was asked to leave what he knew behind for something new.

When you are called by God to grow into your nickname, to do things differently you too might be reluctant. When we do things reluctantly we wonder if God can really use such halfhearted effort. After all we don't really want to do it, we are tired, not giving our best. We don't want to risk and do this new thing. Peter's story reminds us that even if we are reluctant God is with us and potentially great things can happen.

I am reminded of a man I got to know 40 years ago. He had graduated from culinary school and had come to Missoula, Montana with the plan of working in, or even better opening, his own restaurant. He hit town in the midst of an economic downturn and no one was hiring cooks. Also, banks were not interested in loaning money to someone for a restaurant. His wife got a job so they planned to stay but he was stuck. What was he going to do? He learned that the churches in town were going to start a center and one of their goals was to provide a hot lunch five days a week. He talked to a pastor and shared how soup was the way to go. You could use all sorts of donated food. It was nutritious and did not require a huge kitchen. He was asked to be the cook. At the time they could offer him \$100 a week. He reluctantly said yes. This was not what

he had trained to do. He was a chef. So halfheartedly, he helped prepare the place for launch. The volunteers who came to help make the soup were impressed by his knowledge. As word got around about how good the soup was, soon it was suggested that the center allow all people to come and those who could would purchase their soup. Soon the clients were being trained to help make the soup. It became a money making restaurant that supported the caring work it did. They were even able to purchase the building they were in. You came for the soup. At lunch you could have the bank manager sitting beside a homeless person sitting beside a college student. The Poverello Center is still going strong. He recently retired as executive director. It became his life, his passion and it transformed a community. Reluctantly saying yes is not always a bad thing!

We are going to look more at Peter, but for today remember that God always sees what you can do, not where you are. God moves past the flawed moments of our life to something better and invites us into new ventures. We might say yes reluctantly but they can be transformative for us and others.