

## ***Sermon***

### ***Facing our Limit and Giving Up***

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Our scriptures, our message today – talks about hearing God’s voice – but not hearing it for a message – we are recognizing our calling. That moment – or many moments – in our lives when we know we cannot remain as we were. That moment when we need to change, or turn or do something different – that we recognize we are changed and God is leading us somewhere new. We don’t know what the future looks like, we may not even know much more than how to take the first step...and the path look a little perplexing. But we know the time is now. The moment when we feel the presence of the divine, we feel our own consecration. This sanctuary was consecrated – made holy. For Isaiah not only did he witness the glory of God and feel engulfed in the song of holiness praising God from that mysterious swirl of the birdlike creatures called seraphim, but his lips were touched with a burning coal. His lips would no longer be used for idle gossip and small talk – he was consecrated. To consecrate means to “derail from normalcy”.

And Isaiah’s call was a perplexing one...Listen to the words of Isaiah...”Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.” Imagine telling a teacher – make sure the students fail...but this is what Isaiah is called to do.

This is not an unfamiliar place for we people of faith- be honest, how many times have you walked toward your faith while others in your life walk in a different direction? We don't follow the rules of the secular world – the rules of hate your enemy – get revenge, make their lives harder. No, we can't...Jesus changed all that – Jesus and God said love your enemy, understand your enemy, fight for justice for all people. We live in a world that measures success by mass abundance and possessions – yet we take a small piece of bread and small sip of juice and claim to be filled.

We know what love looks like, we know what God expects – can we speak up? Can we make a change in this world? Can just us, little Bacon Memorial on 59<sup>th</sup> Street – can we really make a change? Fight for equality and justice? Do we have the right to? Maybe none of us do. Isaiah didn't – we're told his lips were unclean – he was a sinner. But God called upon him to speak. And God may call upon us as well, even to say things that may be filled with truth but may not make much sense in a world like ours. Isaiah was called to proclaim a word of judgment that was also a word of promise. He was called to persevere and endure, even thought the outward picture of things might become dark and bleak. There was only a 10<sup>th</sup>, a tithe left – not much, but enough. This is the same faith that has been given to us – light and hope in the darkest of times.

Our Gospel today is Luke's account of the call of the first disciple – Simon. Simon, a fisherman, has been out all night and has nothing but empty nets to show for his efforts. Jesus initiates a relationship with Simon by asking him to go and cast his nets once again – and like a tired child he complains back – “we have

been out all night and have caught nothing – have you not seen this?” But somewhere not in Simon’s thinking mind he agrees and says, “if you say so” and goes out again. And Luke tells us they catch so many fish – they need extra boats and even then, the boats begin to sink. And in this moment – this consecrated encounter – Simon understands he is in the presence of the divine and is given his assignment – you will be fishers of men.

Now he’s not then given a 5 day orientation, a manual to follow, some high level education – and he is certainly not someone who was well familiar with the theology Jesus was preaching – Simon is a gentile – but perhaps that is exactly why he is called. Remember God’s words to Isaiah – “...Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.” Maybe we know too much – for our own good. Or what I should say, we have been taught by the wrong authorities. Like Peter’s call to fish for persons, the outcomes are unpredictable when people risk encountering each other across cultures, groups, and traditions, moving beyond stereotypes.

It’s been a tough few years – the pandemic, social unrest – political conflict and this continues. Perhaps like Simon’s response – you’re feeling a little weary in this arena...I look at my colleagues at ECMC and some are facing their limit and giving up.

What made Simon turn around – what made Simon “derail his normalcy” is Jesus in that moment invites Simon into a relationship with him. Jesus’ invitation is in contrast to what is normal in our world isn’t it? We head toward what is

safe, what is predictable. But this, this is an invitation to venture into new ground or new depths – but it also points to new challenges. Simon walks away from his profession after having the catch of his life – who knows how much money he left behind in that moment...and Simon feels unworthy when he recognizes who Jesus is but Jesus responds – “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be a catcher of people.”

There is an undeniable truth in this message – so often the cost of discipleship does not come off the top; it is demanded of us after we have given everything that we can give. Jesus did not show up after a good night’s sleep and a hearty breakfast. He came to find these men at the end of a long working day, after backbreaking labor, and he told them to keep on working. He does the same to you and to all of us.

Can’t sleep at night and you wonder why....maybe God is trying to tell you something.

Amen