St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Luke 5:1-11

The Resounding Call

Sometimes, when we feel the urge to move forward, we get caught up in our own nets. It’s not a good time. It’s not convenient. I can’t attempt that. It’s too hard. Maybe later, when all the obstacles are out of my way.

What Luke’s Gospel makes pretty clear today, is that Jesus’ call to ministry, whatever that ministry may be, is never guaranteed to come at the most convenient time. Jesus didn’t show up at the fishermen’s camp fire, with the smell of roasting fish wafting around a relaxed and congenial air. Jesus came to his disciples after they had been fishing all day and into the night, backs aching, arms on fire, and he tells them to keep on working if they want to catch the fish and proceeds to tell them how. After every one of them practically collapses on the shore, after hauling in more fish than they could ever have dreamed of catching, he tells them that catching fish is ok, but they can do better, they can catch people and there’s no need to be afraid to talk about it. Just passionately believe and it will happen.

It's a good story and a good miracle, and even better, a wonderful metaphor about what it means to be a truly faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It takes courage, commitment and obedience to whatever directions Jesus gives you. If you do, you well may find your nets filling beyond your wildest dreams. Even so, in order to fill those nets, a price must be paid. In order to follow Christ, one must hear his call to action and then discover there is no choice, but to follow, and act.

What Jesus is saying, that in order to fish for people, the fishermen are going to have to start testifying to their belief in all that Jesus shared with them about the course of his ministry, why he would have to die for the salvation of the world, , and that he would rise again in glory. It was a tough story for the disciples to understand, but the time came when they saw with their own eyes the truth of Jesus’ words. And there is where it all began. Testimony upon testimony. Persecuted for it. Swearing by it and dying for it.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians gets into the heart of this kind of commitment, this passionate witness to one’s belief in the good news of Jesus Christ. It’s not for wimps or followers of mainstream trends. It is not for those who watch Christianity from a distance, or dabble from the edges, it is for the deeply committed and courageous hearts of the faithful, who keep God at the center of their lives and actions.

There is confusion in Corinth. Some are thinking they should revert to the old covenant, the old traditions and beliefs, the old way of being and doing things, and Paul is called to remind them of the meaning at the heart of the gospel and the testimonies of those who witnessed the before and after of it all.

Jesus’ very human death and his burial was seen by faithful follower and soldier alike. His resurrection, which had been promised all along, and which was witnessed by a multitude of people who encountered him as the resurrected Jesus, was a divine triumph over death, and there was the good news at last,

It is through the testimonies of these people, what we call, their witness, Paul reminds the people of Corinth and all of us, that the proof that all this truly happened is clearly given. It is through voiced witness to all that happened, the story lived through by people just like all of us, that people in all parts of the world, from all walks of life and all circumstances, have come to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and to follow the Way of the Cross for over 2,000 years.

There is no doubt, it is easier to witness what we have seen with our own eyes, no matter the subject matter. Yet one can, as Paul says, receive in one’s own heart the good news that has been passed down through the ages to us by those who did see with their own eyes at the time of Christ’s resurrection.

This inherited, passionate witness of Jesus’ death and resurrection is not just another bit of data to be added to the millions of bits of data we take into our overflowing minds from moment to moment. Nor is it simply reciting the words of the creed simply because it is a part of the service to which one feels they should attend. It is not about adding church to our good-to-do box in order that our box should remain acceptable to ourselves and society. It is not about how much education we have acquired about the Bible, simply learning doctrine and scripture. It takes little courage, dedication or commitment to do any of these.

It is about understanding our role as Christians in the sharing of experience of the good news of the gospel and the difference it has made in our lives and can make in someone else’s life. The irony is, that when it comes to talking about our own personal experience of the gospel, we might find ourselves needing far more courage to talk about that than just about anything else we can think of!

It is when we *take in* the gospel; *receive* the gospel, we discover Christ in a very different way with a very different perspective on how we view the gospel. It is then that we hear the call to continue the work of testifying to what we know as the powerful presence of Christ in one’s life.

As the gospel enters the very heart of one open to receiving the good news of the gospel there, it shifts one’s very purpose for living, a new way to perceive all that is in the world. It offers a new kind of power, not based on status, wealth or position in society, but an inner power filled with urgency to witness to it, to speak about it, to tell the story of how one’s life has been changed by one’s experience of the gospel.

We Episcopalians have earned our degree in reticence about much of this. No, I’m not suggesting that we should have been all trooping down to Pioneer Square with our sandwich boards and leaflets all these years, but I am suggesting that we get to work on finding the truth of where we are in our hearts. Where we stand with God, each one of us, and collectively, as Church.

What is the depth and breadth of our belief? And, most importantly, if we have stepped across the great divide from non-belief to faithful trust in the gospel, then how ready are we to speak openly and honestly about t? How will you tell your story about how and in what way your life has been transformed by it? What is it that the next generation needs to hear about the gospel, and how will they best hear it?

We may not talk about the gospel in the same way our grandparents or their grandparents did, or in the way that Paul did, or even in the same way as the disciples did following Jesus’ real-life directions. But talk about it in whatever way works for us and for the ears of our community, and for the ears of the world, we must.

Paul gives us some direction to put into our own words and actions, when he talks about all to whom the risen Christ appeared, how they told the story about their encounter with Christ, and how those stories have been passed along to us; Cephas and the other disciples, and apostles along with hundreds of people, and, of course, Paul, himself. All proclaimed the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, his life given for the forgiveness of the sins of the world and for the salvation of all God’s people. All found ways to explain the meaning of all that, using words, stories and situations that people of their time would understand.

The story started in the fishing boats of Galilee and has passed from generation to generation into our own time. And throughout all that time, not one person has ever found a need to embellish or reinvent the gospel, but rather to tell the story in their own way. We have all been called, over the last 2,000 years to simply proclaim what it is we have received, each in our own time.

And here we are, today, as Church, the living witness to the good news of Christ, through our worship, our hearing of the scriptures, through the reciting of our creeds, and through the telling of stories of, by, and about God’s people from the ancient of days until today. Our patterns are no different than they were when they began in the little houses of followers of The Way, as they met to worship and tell the stories over and over again so that we would hear the truth of them 2,000 years later and beyond.

It is when we share the gospel, that we release its very life and hope into the lives of every person who longs to hear good news. It is when we tell the stories of what happened, and our witness is received into the heart of every new believer, that the light of Christ begins to illumine their own life experience. Some things never change, and never will, the witness and testimony simply moves forward through time and the hearts of the faithful.

Paul described himself as, “one untimely born.” The disciples might have said the same about themselves, as we could describe ourselves that way, too. We all might have experienced a moment of belief as unexpected….not easy to accept at first, and perhaps, in a way, shocking.

Paul came face to face with a very real 180 degree turn in his life, from relentless hunter and persecutor of Christians to becoming the first to document his own witness and testimony, to a king and to the peasantry. He thought of himself as “the least of the apostles,” not because he was particularly humble or modest, but because he felt the enormity of what he was called away from and to what he was called going forward.

The obstacles before him were so high, that Paul had to work harder and face tougher circumstances for the sake of the gospel, and he did all of that gladly through what he came to recognize as God’s grace. It was not all about Paul, and he knew it. It was God working in and through Paul that caused him to exclaim, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.”

And down through the ages people have reasoned, I am not Paul. I am not Peter or one of the apostles. Who am I to hold my experiences up to those of the early Church?

Today we are reminded of Jesus’ call to a few fishermen to “follow me” and they did, each coming to faith in their own unique way, just as we do. Each one of us enters onto a spiritual path that is unique unto ourselves. Just as Paul did not try to downplay his sordid past, his striving for power before his Damascus experience, or his anxieties and uncertainty, he entered into his new life of witness, embracing it as fully as he confessed all that he once had been.

Every one of us, and every one who professes faith in the gospel, will come to that place of knowing that we are who we are by the grace of God. We accept that our pains and struggles, our joys, accomplishments and dreams, are very real reflections of the human stories gone before. They are the stories found throughout the gospels, lighting the path for those of us currently on our own journeys of faith.

Having received the testimony of the good news of the gospel from witnesses who span 2,000 years of the telling, now, we too, are the witnesses of Christ’s work in the world. A life turned around from despair to hope, from addiction to a healing force in the world, a broken marriage healed, bitterness and resentment turned to forgiveness and understanding, fear turned to love, greed turned to giving.

We have inherited a shared story of human tragedy, passion, triumph, joy, hope and heart. It is a story of how our experience of Christ leads us to pray for those known or unknown to us who are in need of prayer, leads us to offer solace for those who need comfort, and its poignancy leads each one of us to ask ourselves, “How can my experience of the good news of the gospel, the good news of how Christ has made a difference in my life be told in a compelling and meaningful way to others around me that reaches their own deepest needs?

As modern-day Christians, we have heard a resounding call. A call resonating in our hearts and souls, fashioned from the stories of a multitude of faithful people gone before. A call meant to prepare us to share that resounding call with all those yet to hear our story.

It is the same story Jesus told to simple fishermen and the story they travelled far and wide to tell. It was the story Paul shared with the Corinthians and the story that countless believers have continued to share from generation to generation.

And now it is our story and time to share our own stories of God’s grace in our lives of faith, whoever we are, wherever we are, or however we came to believe in the good news of Jesus Christ. Like Paul, like Peter and like all those before us, we are who we are, by the grace of God, and we give thanks for the opportunity to tell the good news we have to share with all who have need to hear it.

Amen

Written to the glory of God.

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