

3 Epiphany B

“Into thy hands, O Lord, we commend ourselves this day. Let thy presence be with us to its close. Strengthen us to remember that in whatsoever good work we do, we are serving thee. Give us a diligent and watchful spirit that we may seek in all things to know they will, and knowing it, gladly to perform it.” AMEN. Author Unknown

Jesus may change your career. He may change your focus, your hobbies and your lifestyle. One thing for sure is that anyone who has ever received him into their heart has been changed in some way.

Last week we established that Jesus is calling people to follow him today. He is not looking for genius or people of great talent but he is looking for faith. Nathaniel, one of the first apostles called by Jesus in John’s gospel had that faith factor.

Now in Mark’s gospel, we hear Jesus has a career change for a group of four fishermen. He proclaims to them, “The kingdom of God has come near.” This week’s SOS lesson asks some vital questions for us to consider as Jesus proclaims his good news to us. For those who don’t know, SOS is Seeking our Spirituality groups that meet in homes of parish members.

Their focus is to take scripture and apply it to daily life.

Here are the three questions from the SOS lesson:

What have you had to leave behind in order to do what God has asked you? Are there things even now that you feel called to do, but don't because it would require some sacrifice you aren't ready to make? What changes must you make if you are to be a faithful follower of Jesus? These will be our guiding questions for meditations today.

The first question is personal: What have you had to leave behind to do what God asked you? For me one of those things was fear. When I was assigned to the Marines as a chaplain it meant that I would go where they went and try to follow the things they did. One of those things was rappelling off a thirty foot tower. That's not a big deal for a young guy like SGT Michael Lynes. Why did I need to prove anything at age 42? I had to learn to trust the man who was on the ground with the safety brake should I slip and fall or if I could not brake myself. The first time I rappelled I had to give up fear.

Proclaiming the good news can be dangerous. It got John arrested and later he was executed. Fear was the background for the

beginning of Jesus ministry. Yet the time was now. There was no more waiting. The day of decision was at hand. As I looked back at that time in my training I had to jump. My Marines were waiting on me. We ask ourselves, “Will I be able to have the strength to do this?”

Think for a moment what Jesus had asked these fishermen to leave. It was their means of income and the only life they knew. This stranger was telling them the kingdom of God was near. The kingdom for an ancient Jew meant that God would be in control. Governments and rulers would act differently they hoped. An era of lasting peace would be ushered into their world. Yet, others before Jesus had stirred up people and tried to get them to take the kingdom by force. It didn't work.

What happened next was nothing short of a miracle. Jesus said to the four fishermen, “I will make you fish for men.” No riots, no armies, no violent coups? Jesus words were more than semantics. The lives of four men were to be radically changed forever. It was not temporary. It was not to be a weekend trip singing Kumbaya.

Andrew, one of the Baptists's disciples had had heard John preach that the Lamb of God had come. Simon, Andrew's brother was

brought to hear Jesus. The stage was set for what would be the ultimate demand on their faith. Andrew and Simon drop their fishing gear. John and James not only leave their nets but their father as well. What is going on here? People just don't abandon a family business.

So our second question asks us, "Is there something in your way from making the needed sacrifice to answer God's call?" What might it be? Is it fear? Is it your family? Is it money? Is it just you? God can remedy each of these concerns. He can pave the highway and make straight your paths. He can still the mighty waters and he can climb the mountains with you. He is able to put you through school and seminary and help you run for office. He is calling you to something great – will you answer? Our God is a can do God! Our God is able if you are willing! Yea thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our God will be with you and carry you and help you walk in His light.

We are called to follow in faith even when we have no ability. I stuttered from 2nd through 5th grades terribly. Speech therapy was marginally successful. I was afraid of public speaking. I would avoid reports and try to get another student to present a group project.

Through Junior and Senior High Schools and on into college and seminary I would struggle.

In my early twenties I remember a story that helped me focus on God's ability and not my inability. A choir director from my church in Long Island told me of a young man that stuttered. He would be called on to read and preach because people noticed that he was called of God to be a minister. He trusted God to follow that call and his stuttering eventually went away.

What changes might one have to make if one is to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ? I don't know what those changes will be for you. I know I had to trust and obey. God called me, even told me in scripture that he would give me the words to speak and what was I going to do with it?

Among the greatest fishermen I have seen at work are not human beings at all, but those awkward looking birds called pelicans. ...

Some years ago, a news release told of some pelicans that were fishing off the coast of California. Working in that same area was fishing boats. The men on the boats were cleaning their catch and leaving the parts they couldn't sell, throwing them back into the ocean at the water's edge. The pelicans observed what was happening and decided that they could just

eat the waste without having to work for their food. So for weeks, they sat waiting for the fishing boats to come.

After a while, the fishermen discovered that the waste could be sold also. When they stopped dropping the fish waste into the sea, it caught the pelicans unprepared. They just sat there on the shore and waited. They grew thinner by the day and seemed to be able to do nothing about their sad plight. Why? The authorities concluded it was because they had forgotten how to fish. Then the wildlife officials hit upon a plan. They brought pelicans from another area to teach these poor starving birds how to fish again!

We need to learn to fish again! What will you do with the abilities God has given you? Will you follow? If he asked you to leave your nets or what you were doing, would you be ready to go? Are you waiting for someone else to do your fishing for you? As a Christian, God has a claim on your life and mine. We were bought with a price, then are we not his to do as he sees is best? **Lord send us out. Teach us to fish.**
AMEN