

Sermon “Are We Sons and Daughters of Zebedee?”

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Olivet Congregational Church, UCC

January 22, 2023

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9: 2-7

The Righteous Reign of the Coming King

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness

from this time onwards and for evermore.

Matthew 4: 12-23

Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

‘Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.’

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON Are We Sons and Daughters of Zebedee?

Zebedee: Can you believe it? My sons, James and John, just told me that they are leaving our fishing business to follow Jesus. Right in the middle of repairing our nets they up and left. Can you believe it?

Oh, I’m sorry, I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Zebedee. I have two sons, James and John, and we are fishermen. Or maybe I should say that I am a fisherman and my sons were fishermen. But they are no longer fishermen.

You see, Jesus walked by with Peter and Andrew, his brother. They were fishermen too. But Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." So my sons up and left – joined Peter and Andrew - to follow Jesus. One minute we were mending our nets and the next they had left to fish for people.

What about me and their mother? What about our fishing business? I have worked, fished, all these years, putting meals on the table and clothes on our backs. Then my boys, well they're men now, joined me. We have a family business. I relied on my sons. What will I do now?

Jesus told them they would fish for people. Fish for people? What does that mean? How do you make a living doing that? And where are they going to live? And what do they see in this Jesus anyway? They just met him. How can you give up everything and follow him? Have they lost your minds?

I love my sons. They are good boys. I mean men. I don't know what they see in this Jesus. I don't understand how they can give up on being fishermen - fishing for FISH. It's not glamorous work. The hours are long. The work is heavy and smelly. But it's an honest living.

My sons are good men. I trust them. I have always trusted them. They have not let me down before. How will I explain this to their mother? I don't understand but I will try.

This Jesus, this man, I don't know what they see in him. Jesus is telling people to repent and hear the good news. What good news? Jesus has taken up the call of that man, John, who was baptizing people in the Jordan River and telling them to repent. He was preaching. Maybe you could call him a prophet. But now John has been arrested, and Jesus is calling people to repent and proclaim the good news. Good news? What good news? How is John's arrest good news? My sons have left us to follow Jesus. How is that good news for me?

This Jesus, if he is a prophet like John or other prophets, life won't be easy. Look at what happened to John. He's been arrested for telling people to repent – to turn their lives around.

Authorities – they don't like prophets. Rich and powerful people don't like them much either. They don't like that prophets tell them what they should do according to God. Prophets speak out against worshipping power and putting

oneself above others, against hoarding wealth, against oppressing people. They challenge people to live righteous lives, do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Jesus is healing lots of people. People are already flocking to him. Who knows, he could become a threat to the establishment with his healing and attracting followers. And his talk of repentance because the “kingdom of heaven has come near.” His talk of some new kind of kingdom of heaven coming near – the Romans and the powerful are not going to like that.

Following Jesus does not sound like it will be easy. Fishing for people, I guess that’s about bringing them into a different kind of net, a net of love. As more people heed Jesus’ invitation to follow him, maybe there they will be other people like my sons, people who want to follow Jesus. It may not be easy but maybe they can help create a kingdom of heaven.

Maybe there’s something to this Jesus. I don’t know what my sons see in Jesus. Maybe it’s charisma. Or maybe it’s love, an uncommon love, a love that radiates from him. But I trust my sons. I will try to understand. I guess this Jesus must be someone special...

Thank you listening to my wondering, my venting, my rambling... Who knows, maybe someday I will decide to follow Jesus. I am not sure what that means. But, we will see...

This morning’s scripture story is about Jesus calling Simon Peter, Andrew, and Zebedee’s sons, James and John. Everyday men. Fishermen. Those young men who, when they heard Jesus’ call, responded by dropping what they were doing and following Jesus. That required faith in Jesus, courage to leave behind the security of family, of income, of jobs, of a home and of knowing who you are.

The monologue you just heard is obviously imagined. There is no indication Zebedee had any sort of conversation with his sons. Nor do we know what he might have thought when James and John up and left. But I imagine there could have been some concern, anxiety or fear on the part of Zebedee, especially since Jesus appeared to be following in John the Baptist’s footsteps and John had been arrested.

When Jesus called Simon/Peter, Andrew, James and John, they were in their boats, doing what they knew. These men gave up the lives they knew to follow Jesus. Matthew tells us they did this immediately. I'm not sure their decision was the most logical thing to do. Maybe you could say that they did this in a heartbeat, that they followed their hearts.

Jesus told them, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; ... believe in the good news.' What was this good news? Was God's Kingdom really near?

I imagine the disciples wanted good news, wanted to believe God's Kingdom was near. Their world was a mess. Jerusalem and all of Judea were under Roman occupation. The Jewish people had lived under occupation of conquerors throughout history. People were struggling, were oppressed. Those in power made life difficult for those who had no power. The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah. Maybe the disciples thought that Jesus was the Messiah, or at least a prophet. Maybe they wanted to become part of a movement.

I can't imagine they would have had any idea what it meant to follow Jesus. Leaving the security of the lives they knew, of not knowing where their next meal would come from, not knowing where they would sleep at night, and not having a daily routine that they knew or what to expect each day would have taken courage. Once the disciples decided to follow Jesus, who had just begun healing and preaching, they had no idea what to expect. The disciples did not know where their journeys with Jesus would take them. They did not know that following Jesus would eventually lead to Calvary and the cross. They just knew they had to take the first step.

They wanted to be part of Jesus' good news, of that heavenly kingdom. Jesus was the Good News. Jesus is the Good News.

We too live in difficult times. It can be difficult to believe the Kingdom of God is near. There is stress and division in our world, sometimes even among families and neighbors. There are great differences among people about what to do about refugees and immigrants, about who and how many people we will allow into our country and how to do that; about how we provide a health care system that is equitable for all people; about if or how daycare, early childhood education

and school lunches for children who are food insecure will be paid for; and about how we protect our environment for future generations.

How are we to care for people and creation?

How do we follow Jesus? Maybe we can think about Jesus invitation to his disciples, and his invitation to us, to follow him and believe that the heavenly kingdom is near – not when we die but where we live. There was something about that invitation, something about Jesus that drew the disciples to him. The disciples felt compelled to follow him, even when they did not know where it would take them. Maybe he gave them hope. Maybe he touched their hearts. Maybe they felt his love. You know that people who love attract other people to themselves. Love does that, love attracts people to it.

Maybe that's how we begin to follow Jesus, taking a lesson from those sons of Zebedee. Maybe we respond to his invitation to follow him. Maybe we start by spending time with him. We can make time for prayer - for conversations with Jesus. Having conversations with Jesus as his disciples did or going off to pray as Jesus himself would go off to pray, can guide us. Maybe we can notice the little things in nature like Jesus did– like seeds being spread and sprouting, fig trees, lilies of the fields and birds of the air. Maybe we can become more aware of Jesus' presence in our world – in places we see acts of compassion and kindness, mercy and justice, forgiveness and healing, and love. And we might spread the love of Jesus by finding our own ways to share the good news of Jesus and his love and offer hope.

Drawn to Jesus by his love, feeling his love, we might decide to love more, not just family and friends, but to love all people, even those we or society find difficult to love. And as we live in Jesus' love and as we bring his love to others, we might become like James and John – those sons of Zebedee. We might fish for people. Perhaps we might even bring some of them into the net that is Jesus love. So I ask you, what draws you to Jesus? What about Jesus touches your heart? Where might Jesus invitation to follow him take you?

Recently I heard this contemporary Christian song, "The Summons". Now I don't have the music so we can sing it. But I will read you the lyrics. It begins with an invitation from Jesus to follow him. And it ends with, hopefully, our reply.

The Summons*

*Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let me name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?*

*Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?*

*Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you and you in me?*

*Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found*

*To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you and you in me?*

*Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In you and you in me.*

Jesus said, "Follow me..."

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