

My home church was big on the invitation at the end of the service. I never cared for it – seemed to me to be a waste of time since usually all of us were church members. Trying to get someone to come forward and join the church seemed to be the criterion of whether the service was a success or failure. So, we mostly failed. At my friend's church, I discovered they were more into the invitation than we were. On about the 5th verse of "Softly and Tenderly" (which was the third invitational hymn) I decided to go down and let the preacher pray for me. I didn't see any other way out of the service. So we have mainly gotten away from that invitation part of the service. Maybe we were concentrating on the wrong invitation. I do believe that every service calls us to faithful living. Sometimes that will cause us to make some decision about who we are, what we do, and how we do it. That is a better calling than saving people from hell.

And just what do you think the text in Luke is about today? Right, invitation!! Jesus is calling Simon, James and John (I believe Andrew was there also, but got left out in the story) to a new career. He is asking them to give up fishing and come with him to do his work of bringing the Good News to the people. I believe that Simon, James, John and Andrew knew Jesus. They had probably discussed this day – this invitation. They have fished all night. They have caught nothing. The work with the nets is hard and they have got to be tired. Jesus suggested that they try a new area. He says to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let your nets down for a catch." Master," says Simon, "We have worked all night and have caught nothing." I can imagine the thoughts going through Simon's head. "This carpenter, who hasn't worked all night; this carpenter who does not fish for a living; this carpenter wants to tell us how to fish." But whatever Simon thought, he obeyed the words of Jesus. They caught so many fish they had to get friends to come with another boat to help them with the catch. It is then that Simon recognizes he is in the presence of the power of God. What changes in the text is not the amount of fish. What changes is the difference in the faith of Simon. "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man." But Jesus calls Simon and James and John and Andrew and asks them to join him in his work. Jesus is calling them to a new career, a new kind of living. It is the invitation to come and work to bring the Good News of God to all the people.

Jesus calls these disciples in the everyday experiences of life – just as God calls us. It is the same thing that happened to Moses. He is our in Median, tending the sheep – his everyday work. Moses hears the invitation of God – this calling of God. Gideon was in the thrashing barn, thrashing wheat because he was afraid to be outside – the Philistines might see him. So he is in there separating the wheat from the chaff and God calls Gideon. In our Old Testament text for today, Isaiah is in the temple, probably attending the funeral of King Uzziah. He has this vision of God and hears the voice of God calling to him.

It is in the common everyday experiences of life that God calls to us. I believe the text is saying that God cares about our lives. In 1978, the film, O GOD, was given an award. The film portrayed the message that God cares about people, God comes to people, God wants people to be happy. Do you know the award the film received? "Best Fantasy Film of the Year." To some, it may be a fantasy that God cares for us, loves us and comes to us in the ordinary affairs of our lives. If we believe that, then we also hear this invitation to put our nets in new places. I admit that sometimes it seems best to stay in the shallow water.

It is mainly calm, familiar to us. Sometimes, we are like the people at Capernaum who tried to detain Jesus, to get him to stay in Capernaum. The invitation to the church is that is not be a little self-satisfied place. The gift of God calls us to responsibility in the larger world. Jesus spoke to Simon and James and John and Andrew and he called them to a larger venture.

PILGRIM C H U R C H

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I love the story of the sophomore who worked in the library at Princeton to earn money to help with his education. One night at closing time, he was walking among the book shelves when he noticed in the back corner an old man reading and taking notes. The old man was very intent on his work. The librarian walked over and asked what he was working on.

The old man looked long enough to say, "Well, I'm a student of physics." The young librarian said, "Well, last year I took a course in physics and think I have all I need for understanding physics." He turned and went back out to the checkout desk. I can only imagine his chagrin a few minutes later when the old man checked out some books and on his library card was the name Albert Einstein.

This invitation is a process. I never met Einstein and I never stood in the middle of a boat full of fish on the sea of Gennesaret. I don't know a lot about this miracle stuff. So how do I know God is calling to me? I believe this invitation from God comes amid our ordinary living. You may not know what to do tomorrow, but you know what to do today. Do what you know to do. Do what makes you happy and helps others. I suspect every one of us in worship today knows that there is something we can do for God today. Do what you know to do in your every day living. It is in our every day living that we live out this invitation to serve God.

Our long range task force and our congregation is meeting and seeking answers to questions like: "Where are we going to relocate? How are we going to expend our resources, our money, our time, our talents and our gifts? How will we live out our calling as Pilgrim Congregational Church?" It is a lot like the story in Luke today. Where will we put down our nets? We are called. We have this invitation to be the People of God in our own day. Our world is changing. We as a church are changing.

Cameron reminded us that our prayers and reflection are vital to our church renewal.

Our statistics, our surveys, our planning – all very important. I read of these land surveyors who were sent from a large city in Wales to survey the mountains in North Wales.

They stayed in an isolated cabin in shepherd country. Every day they went out with their maps, compasses and charts checking the country. Several days into the first week, an old shepherd came up to them and said, "Might be best if I go with you tomorrow."

They said, "No, we have our maps and charts. We know these hills just like you.

We'll be okay. The old shepherd said, "You may have your maps, but the fog is not on the map."

Sometimes our surveys, our planning is not enough. We realize that it is in the power and strength of God that we do God's work. This process we are in as a congregation will be humbling. It will also be a joyful and progressive experience. Let us not be weary in seeking to be the People of God in our own time.