

A DAY UNLIKE ANY OTHER DAY

Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on January 22, 2023

Text: Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, 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."

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 sea—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 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.

The more you read the Bible the more you notice that it's full of beginnings. There's a beginning for the world when God speaks creation into existence. There's a beginning for Noah and his family after the flood. There's a beginning for Abraham when God sends him off in search of a new home. There's a beginning for the Israelites when Moses leads them out of Egypt. There's a beginning for Paul on the road to Damascus. There's a beginning for the church when the Spirit arrives at Pentecost. Everywhere you look in the Bible, there's a beginning, a fresh start, a second chance, a new life, including the one we see in the gospel reading this morning.

One day some fishermen get up early, go down to the docks, climb in their boats, row out a little ways from the shore, and drop their nets in the sea, hoping for a good catch. Their names are Andrew, Simon, James, and John, and this is what they've done every day since they were old enough to tie a knot.

But today is a day unlike any other day. Today while they're out on the water, a man comes walking along the beach. He's a rabbi, a teacher. Maybe they've seen him around before, maybe they haven't. He calls out to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Most people would laugh at an offer like that, it seems so impractical and

foolish. Most people would be like, "Yeah, right. We're going to give up our livelihoods, leave our homes and families, and go fish for people, whatever that means." But that's exactly what these four fishermen do. They drop everything and follow Jesus. And that decision is a beginning for them. It's the beginning of an adventure that will take them places they never imagined, show them things they never dreamed were possible, put them in situations they never thought they could handle, reveal gifts they never knew they had, and in the end completely change and transform them.

"An adventure," according to G. K. Chesterton, "is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing that chooses us, not a thing that we choose." I guess that's because a real adventure is something that takes us outside our comfort zones, something that's risky, something that doesn't come with any guarantees, something that requires us to let go, and that's something not many of us would ever choose. We'd much rather take the safe, predictable path—the path that's not going to get us into any trouble, the path that's not going to spring any surprises on us. But the thing about safe, predictable paths is that they're almost never the beginning of anything, and they almost never change or transform anyone.

So Jesus comes to the disciples and chooses them. He makes them an offer most people would laugh at, it's so impractical and foolish. But they jump in with both feet, and their lives are never the same again. And I think that's the point of the story. The disciples don't hold back. They go off on this adventure. They travel around with Jesus from one place to another. They talk with him and

listen to his teachings. They see how he how he cares for people, and how he accepts people, and how he challenges people. And what they get out of that whole experience is "a picture of what a life full of God looks like," as Marcus Borg puts it. And they begin to grow in that image. They begin to grow in love and compassion, courage and commitment.

If you ask me, I think that's what we all want deep down. I think that's what brings us all here to church. It's not just the free coffee after worship. It's the hope that church will be the beginning of an adventure for us, too. It's the hope that church will change us and transform us. It's the hope that church will help us grow in the image of Jesus. Otherwise what's the point? Why would we come here week after week if it's not going to make any kind of tangible difference in our lives—if it's not going to help us find a more gracious and generous way of being in the world?

So can it? Can church really be and do all of that? It can if we come here with the right understanding and the right expectation—if we come here knowing what this community is primarily about, which is not what we often think.

We often think going to church is about becoming a good person, and we think if we just get with the program, somehow church will rub off on us. If we just show up on Sunday morning, maybe serve on a committee, maybe join a Bible study, maybe go on a mission trip, eventually something will stick. But based on what I've seen as a pastor, it rarely ever does when we approach it that way. Instead, what I've seen happen many times is, someone will join a church, and they'll start out strong. They'll get super involved right away. But the moment

they're hoping for never comes—the moment they become the person they want to be—and eventually they get tired of waiting, and the next thing you know they're gone.

What people don't understand sometimes is that church isn't about becoming a good person—not primarily anyway. It's about spending time with God. It's about centering ourselves in the sacred. It's about developing a relationship with Jesus.

That's what the adventure was for the disciples. They didn't jump out of their boats because they wanted to be good people. They jumped out of their boats because they were intrigued by this person who came walking along the beach one day and made them this crazy offer, and they wanted to find out who he was and what his life was about.

That's the adventure for us, too—getting to know Jesus and seeing what a life full of God looks like. And yes, along the way that life may rub off on us, and we may begin to grow in all kinds of ways. But primarily, we do all the things we do because they give us little glimpses of God among us and bring us that much closer to the Divine. We show up on Sunday morning because every now and then we hear a word that speaks directly to where we are at that specific moment. We serve on committees because every now and then we feel the Spirit working through our efforts. We study the Bible because every now and then a passage breaks open and reveals something new and unexpected. We go on mission trips because every now and then we sense that we're standing in the living presence of love and compassion.

So today we're ordaining and installing church officers, and as they begin and continue their ministries, I encourage them to think of this as the beginning of an adventure, and to be on the lookout for little glimpses of God as they go about their duties. I pray that this experience will change and transform them, and help them grow in the image of Christ. Amen.