

St. Hilda's Sechelt 2020

Matthew 4:18-22

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.

There is a painting in a small jewel of a Chapel on Prince Edward Island that just so happens to depict one of the stories within our Gospel for today: the call of Peter and Andrew.

It's a painting of two men in a boat, of course. The first man is older, bearded, and is seated with his hand on a fishing net, his face just turning away from the viewer and toward a mysterious figure on the shore behind him. The second man, a younger man, is standing up in the boat behind the first, with one hand on the older man's shoulder and his other hand hovering above his heart as if he has been startled. This second man's face is fully turned toward the mysterious figure on the shore behind him. I call the figure on the shore “mysterious” because the figure is no more than a dark outline with the barest suggestion of light behind it.

Matthew's Gospel, the Gospel appointed for today, tells us its own version of the call of St. Andrew, a version that on the surface seems much like the depiction in the painting.

Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee, Matthew tells us, and sees two fishermen who are brothers—Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. They're in the middle of their work casting their nets into the sea when without so much as a “Hello How are you?” Jesus tells them to follow him, commenting that, if they do, they will be fishing for people. In response to Jesus; words both men immediately leave their nets and follow Jesus.

Now you might say that that's exactly what's depicted in the painting—for the painting shows two men in their boat fishing and a figure on the shore who appears to have gotten their attention. But the difference is this—while Matthew's story is a kind of broad daylight story, a kind of Jesus-did-this-and-said-that-and-then-the-brothers-immediately-responded kind of story, the painting depicts a kind of twilight realm or a just-before daybreak realm—a place of shadows and mysterious, muted light behind the figure on the shore whose face they and we cannot see.

Another way to say this is that while Matthew rushes to the immediate response of Peter and Andrew to follow Jesus, the painting lingers in the moment—in Peter and Andrew's surprise, confusion, and fear at the appearance of the mysterious figure who intrudes into the middle of their everyday work and asks them to give it up, to give it all up and do something uncertain and different.

And, I believe, the painting poses a question—will the two follow Jesus, even though the call is coming from one they neither know nor completely understand? Will they follow the one whose call disrupts their lives and threatens to take them away from all that is familiar to them? Will they?

Which, of course, brings us back to ourselves, to you and to me, as we go about our normal lives just as Peter and Andrew were doing and as we, like they, find ourselves encountering something or someone mysterious who asks us to consider a new horizon and a new path toward that horizon. It's back to you and me as we find ourselves interrupted by something or someone who brings change and uncertainty and who calls us to wade out in a new direction without knowing the way.

So as I think about this, this has been the story of St. Hilda's for last few years. For, here you were, doing what a normal parish would do, when all of a sudden, there stood a mysterious stranger in your midst in the form of news about your building. There stood a mysterious stranger in your midst telling you to follow him out of your building into a process of disassembling it and building a new one.

And then of course, as the building project was coming together and life was getting back to normal, there again stood a mysterious stranger in the form of news that your rector had been offered and had accepted a new job and is leaving the parish. There stood a mysterious stranger telling you to follow him into an interim time.

As I think about it, the interim period itself is about living in the presence of a mysterious stranger in the form of many new insights, many new questions, many new issues that invite consideration about what direction you are called to go in and what path you are called to follow now.

And so this is what I think—that what we learn from this story, the story of the call of Peter and Andrew, is that Jesus loves to interrupt us whenever we believe that we have everything figured out and whenever we think that life will continue along the way it always has. Jesus loves to interrupt us with a new call to follow him that promises to take us both beyond what we are sure we understand and beyond what we are accustomed to doing.

Where in your personal or family life has some sort of mysterious stranger come to visit? Where is someone or something standing on the horizon calling you to examine your assumptions and consider actions different from those you usually engage in?

And where at St. Hilda's in this interim period, has a mysterious stranger come to stand in your midst or at the edge of your consciousness? What is that mysterious stranger asking you to consider? What is that mysterious stranger asking you to do? And how is any of that related to Jesus—the Lord of Life, the Lover of Souls, the One who comes and makes us all kin?

For the way to tell whether or not the mysterious figure on the horizon of our lives who comes to up end our assumptions about life and our plans, the way to tell whether this mysterious figure has anything to do with Jesus is to look at what he is inviting us to do.

- Is he inviting us to expand our sense of who we are and what we are capable of?
- Is he inviting us to turn away from diminishing others and to turn toward actions that acknowledge the dignity all are given by God?

- Is he inviting us to listen more fully to others and to suspend the sense that we alone are right?
- Is he inviting us to forgive? Inviting us to give others a second chance?
- Is he inviting us to reconcile and to make peace?
- Is he inviting us to befriend and to experience the joy of that befriending?

These for me are some of the marks of the presence of Jesus in the mysterious figures and circumstances that appear in our lives. And just as in the story of the call of Peter and Andrew, each of these invitations leads us into a future we cannot know. And perhaps this is what frightened Peter and Andrew and what frightens us the most. In responding to one of these invitations, head out into unknown territory.

But we need not be afraid for we are not out in that unknown territory alone. Each invitation is an invitation to follow the one who, himself, is no stranger to unknown territory. To follow the one who is God's very self who entered into the unknown territory of our flesh. To follow the one who criss-crossed geographies and moved among people whom others considered to be unclean. To follow the one who willingly travels into the ultimate unknown territory--death itself.

This is the one inviting us to come out from where we had settled and where we had become comfortable and to follow him into the unknown.

What can we do but follow him?

We must surely follow him.