

“Six Words That Can Change Your Life”
Epiphany 5, Year C
February 7, 2010

Today’s text contains some of the most frightening and intriguing words of the New Testament. Six words from the very end of this narrative that give us such a complete picture of how the ministry and mission of Christ began. Six words that are so simple and compelling: “They left everything and followed him.”

Why? What in the world possessed them? What happened out there aboard those boats that made them cut life-long ties and plunge into the unknown with a man they barely knew, that they’d just recently met? What do you think you would have done if you’d been in their boots or boats? Where would you be willing to follow Jesus to?

The disciples had no idea they were the first of a worldwide movement that would span the centuries and shape history for a millennia and more to come when they left their nets that day. Hard to imagine what they thought as they first saw Jesus coming toward them. They were just washing their nets after a long and unrewarding night on the big lake. The care and repair of the nets was their concern of the moment. Well-taken care of nets makes all the difference to the professional fisherman. These were pros, you know, men who knew every eddy and current, every fishing hole, whose boats had plied these waters for hundreds of years, whose father’s fathers’ fathers had been fishermen on the great Sea of Galilee. And into this lush countryside setting the green fields and trees, the deep blue of the water comes a teacher and a crowd. He asks for use of the boat and gets it to teach and preach in His own unique way about God without the crush of people. And then, when he’s finished, he says to the rough and ready crew of the boat, worn out from a long night’s work, “How about a little fishing? Let’s see if we can’t catch a few out there in the middle.” And with a little protest from Peter - “All right, if you say so, Boss. I mean, that was a nice sermon and you deserve a little leisure time, but it’s easy to see you’re the preacher and not a professional fisherman. We didn’t catch a single thing out there all night.” off they go out to the deep.

And then it happens. Two boats full of fish. Fish WHEN you’re not supposed to get fish -after the sun is high in the sky - WHERE you’re not supposed to get fish - out in the deep. The difference here has to be the WHO - and the WHO is Jesus, and though he’s just met Him, Peter realizes he is not in the presence of just any man. And, in the presence of this Jesus he realizes WHAT he is: a sinful man. Then, in just a few moments he cuts his ties with the life he has known and the professional fisherman goes off to become an amateur fisher of men.

Interesting, isn’t it, that Jesus revealed Himself to these new disciples in the midst of an activity they performed every day - while they were about their work. He doesn’t heal them of exotic diseases or raise a dead relative or move a mountain. He catches a miraculous catch of fish. That is when the disciples realize who he is. Think about that because that is the way he comes to us and calls us. His magic moments in our lives happen in the everyday things - on the job, in the kitchen, around the table, talking to a friend, reading a book. Jesus makes Himself available to us in all we do - if only we’ll look for Him there.

He comes to us in the midst of our everyday lives with the miraculous presence of His Spirit right where we live. He starts in the waters of Baptism, in a church, in a living room, in a hospital bed. And there, in the midst of our lives, He calls us to follow Him, to be loved by Him and love Him in return, to realize His presence in us twenty-four hours a day.

You know, we're as human and common as Peter who confessed his sinfulness. And the beautiful thing about this passage is the commonness of Peter and the others that Jesus calls. They weren't kings and princes, powerful leaders, the educated and erudite - they were just ordinary folk, sinful folk who needed a Savior. Oh, they could have chosen to ignore Him, to shut their ears to His call, to say, in effect, "Go away, don't bother me, don't ask me to believe, to help, to serve, don't ask me to do anything, to say anything," as many of us have. We can turn from the call of Jesus. We can turn from God Himself. Then, like a boat too full of fish...we're sunk. Yes, without Jesus, we're sunk and will remain so. But with Him we have a future. In Him, we're alive in the Spirit. As His brothers and sisters in faith we're called and chosen - a royal priesthood, a holy nation - a people of purpose.

Those first fishermen/disciples found themselves in a spot out there in the middle of the deep blue sea where they could not afford NOT to follow Jesus. Once touched by His presence there was no choice - they went. There was no consideration of stock options and savings accounts, rehabbing in the house that needed to be completed and dental work that had to be finished. Not even the love of wife and children stood in their way. They were gone.

Frightening to consider isn't it? Makes you ask yourself, "Have I ever felt that committed to the faith? Have I ever been that close to Christ? That 'in tune' with His call? Have I ever been touched by Him to the extent that I'd give up everything? Do I see my sinfulness and run to the righteousness of Jesus every day? Do I remember the gift of faith given to me, the washing of the water, the strength of Christ's body and blood at work in me? Am I attentive to the Spirit's leading. Do I see the opportunities around me to share, to witness, to carry out deeds of love and offer hands to help - to shoulder another's burden?"

The essence of Christ's call, which applies to all professions, to whatever job God gives you to put your hands to: fishermen, office workers, laborers, professors, politicians, pastors, teachers and presidents is this: **LET CHRIST BE SEEN IN YOUR LIFE, IN YOUR ACTIONS, IN THE WAY YOU LOVE AND SERVE ONE ANOTHER AND IN YOUR PRIORITIES** - and you don't have to leave home to do that. In fact, that is where the calling of Jesus is most powerfully seen.

That's all right there in those six words and that's quite enough. Because it means cutting all the strings we've got that tie us down and hold us back from God's full service. Serving God by serving others - by steeping yourself in God's Word is as risky, painful, messy, joyful, rewarding, hope-filled and gut-wrenching now as it was when Peter left his family. You are promised it won't be easy, that you very well might/will get hurt, lose status, lose friends, lose time, lose sleep - that happens all the time. And I'll bet after a few days out on the road around a campfire the disciples probably had fond wishes of returning to little Capernaum and their wives and boats. The path they chose was not wide and easy - it was a narrow path - not without it's miracles, mind you, but it also led to the garden where they left Jesus and to the

cross where they saw Him die - those who weren't cowering in a corner afraid for their lives - all that before it led to the open grave and took them out into the whole world to be fishers of all people.

“They left everything and followed him.” Six words that can change your life. You see, when all the strings are cut, when Christ is all in all, when we understand that by faith and the Holy Spirit Jesus truly lives in who we are and what we do, then we'll know the freedom of this great call. It's the freedom of being wrapped in the arms of God and in ministry to others - so much so that wherever you are with Jesus you are home. Cut the strings, follow the call, plunge into the activities of your life with a free and joyful heart - God will grant the increase and fill your boat to overflowing. AMEN

Now may our most holy God whose glory fills the earth and before whom angels stand in awe, open our eyes and expand our vision to see His power at work in His world.