

1/22/2023: Third Sunday After Epiphany

It's pretty intimidating for me to be standing here. In a place I feel I have no business being. Doing something I have no business doing.

I imagine that's how these first 4 apostles felt in the presence of Christ. Especially after spending time with Jesus, hearing his lessons, seeing his miracles and slowly putting together in their mind just what they were witnessing. Culminating with the confession of St. Peter. Which the Episcopal Church remembers and celebrates on the 18th of January. When asked by Jesus "who do you say that I am?" St. Peter replies; "You are the messiah. The son of the living God."

If I try to put myself in those shoes and I think, this is the son of God. The long awaited messiah, and he's picked me? For what purpose was I chosen? After all I'm only a fisherman.

Could you imagine? Imagine you're at work, or school or whatever it is you do day to day. This stranger, this person you don't know from Adam (well the old Adam anyway). Just walks up to you and says (I'm paraphrasing) "stop what you're doing and follow me". Would you do it?

I can guess what my answer would be. Drop everything and come with you? Look dude, I got bills, a job and a family. I got Responsibilities. These apostles, they weren't all that different from us. They had worries, jobs and families.

But they did follow Jesus. And as the gospel tells us. Immediately they did so. I'm thinking they had to be guided by something more than just one man's natural charisma. And it couldn't have been easy either. To just up and leave everything behind. To take that, what is pretty much a literal leap of faith.

Then as today, if anyone were to walk away from everything to follow a homeless preacher, we would think they've lost their minds.

To further illustrate what I'm feeling, you could look at the conversion of St. Paul which we remember and celebrate January 25th. This man, Saul of Tarsus was someone who persecuted the church. He encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. While on his way to do some more persecuting. To help make more martyrs. In church speak we use that word martyr. We use it to celebrate the lives and faith those who were killed for believing in Jesus.

Let's make no mistake, Saul (later Paul, who we now call St. Paul) was on his way to help with murder. Not unlike what happened with St. Stephen. The first Christian martyr. While Paul may not have physically harmed Stephen, we know he was there and watched approvingly.

But instead of that: the risen Jesus appears to Saul, and for this at best, accessory to murder everything changes. It changed for him when he followed the first instruction given. "get up, enter the city and you will be told what you are to do." That was his first step. Just as those 4 fisherman we heard about in the gospel took their first step to literally follow Jesus.

I said before I imagine how the Apostles felt. But we know St. Paul struggles with the question "why me?" In his writing he calls himself the least of the apostles and even unfit to be called an Apostle.

I told you those things to bring us back to why, specifically I'm up here.

I volunteered to speak to you all this morning. On a side note, notice I said speak, not preach. I am not a preacher, trained or otherwise. But I volunteered because I've asked the Sunday School students to step outside their "comfort zone" to try something new. I'm up here because I couldn't ask them to do something I'm not willing to do. As we've heard many times in scripture, Jesus calls out and rebukes hypocrisy maybe more than anything else.

While I'm on the subject. I would like to take a moment to thank the students. You're doing a good job this morning. If this is your first time doing something like this, I hope you can see a little bit of what I mean when I say almost every class. We don't go to church. We are the church. So thank you for being the church in a more visible way.

So if I feel a bit out of my comfort zone this morning, it's only fair since it's possible I put the youths here out of theirs.

And if I feel inadequate for the task at hand, I can imagine especially those first 4 Apostles felt the same. And we know for a fact, the Apostle to the Gentiles did since he told us so.

So considering our youths here this morning, and remembering the Apostles. I must say, I'm in some pretty good company in my discomfort.

God made Abraham and Sarah parents in their old age, when they believed it was impossible.

God made Moses, who by his own admission wasn't good with words and may have had a speech impediment the advocate for his people and sent him to Pharaoh. And later made him the leader of his people.

God took Mary and made her a virgin mother. Which nature says is impossible.

And as we heard in our reading today. God made common fishermen some of his closest friends and leaders of his church.

Scripture is full of God calling people. And God having to reassure those called that He is with them. He called and even coaxed them out of their comfort zone. Or you could say, out of their boat.

God is with us too. He calls to us to serve him and serve others. So what's stopping us from branching out to serve him in different ways? Ways that we write off. "Oh that's not something I could do. Oh that's for someone else." Yes, even in ways that may make us uncomfortable? We'll never know what we can do, with God's help if we don't take the first step.

There's no telling what God can make us into if only we leave the boat. Amen.