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St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
25th January 2009
Epiphany III
Mark 1:14-20

There is an old Christian tradition
that God sends each person into this
world
with a special message to deliver,
with a special song to sing for others,
with a special act of love to bestow.
No one else can speak my message,
or sing my song,
or offer my act of love.
These are entrusted only to me.

Once upon a time, there were four men fishing – Andrew and his brother Simon, and James and his brother John, whose father was Zebedee. They were fishing morning, noon, and night, some days hauling in great nets full of fish, and some days hauling in empty nets. Some days they made a lot of money selling their fish, and sometimes they made very little. It was hard work, with long hours, clothes that smelled like fish, fish scales under their fingernails. But it was what they knew best, and it was a good way to feed their families.

There was something missing in their lives, though – and they didn't know what it was. They didn't even talk to each other about it very much, but each one of them, Andrew and Simon and James and John, all knew that life could be so much better. They just didn't know how to make it happen. They prayed to God for enlightenment, but it didn't come.

Then, one day, a man was walking by the seashore. His name was Jesus. He looked at Andrew and Simon and James and John and said, "Follow me." The four of them *immediately* dropped their nets, got out of their boats, and followed Jesus and became his disciples. And their lives were changed forever.

And that's what it means to be called.

John Powell, *Through Seasons of the Heart*, Collins 1988; quoted in Francis Dewar, *Called or Collard?*, London, SPCK, 1991, p. 1.

A total change of life.

An adventure.

A “once upon a time” experience, an experience of wonder, of humor, of danger, of fantasy, and of learning.

It’s a “once upon a time” experience because an adventure is a thing that comes to us – we don’t find an adventure, the adventure finds us. We don’t find God, God finds us.

Andrew and Simon and James and John took a risk – they followed the risk-maker, Jesus. They dropped their nets. They *unattached* themselves to whatever it was in their lives that was safe and comfortable and sure – and their lives were transformed.

We’re all attached to something – but did you know that the word “attachment” actually has its roots in the Old French *attachier, estachier, estache* – “stake” – like a stake in the ground... to *bind* one thing to another. Attachments can be good – life giving, in fact, such as when we feel attached to a wife or husband, or to a child, or a parent. But attachments can be spiritually perilous, as well – think of the attachments we’ve seen in the news: attachment to money, like some of our Wall Streeters... attachment to power, like dictators of our past and present and any number of others we could name, including a few Americans... attachment to material “things” to the point where they get in the way of our relationships – whether it be a Hummer or addictions or even traditions that keep us from exploring new and interesting relationships and new ways of doing things.

Jesus asks us to cut those attachments. To leave them behind. To become attached, if to anything, to love of God and neighbor – attachment to a new way of living and loving. Being called by Christ is risky business and frightening business, but what glorious business it can be. It is a calling to love of God and neighbor expressed in radical, counter-cultural communities of worship and mission. Communities of grace. Communities of disciples who attract seekers and help them become new disciples. Joining in the risk-taking, walking onto the thin ice, taking discipleship step-by-step and growing in the joy that is God’s love.

Andrew and Simon and James and John, sons of Zebedee, took that risk. Jesus said, “Follow me,” and Jesus says that to us. Andrew and Simon and James and John, sons of Zebedee, took the risk of leaving behind their old way of life, and

became disciples of the Lord of all Creation, the Lord of all Love, the Lord who calls us again and again.

We have, just this past week, had quite a complexity of events. On Monday we celebrated the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who disattached himself from a culture that endorsed discrimination, from laws that perpetuated Jim Crow, even from the assurance of his own physical safety, because he had become attached to a spirit of justice, of harmony, and of grace.

On Tuesday, no matter what your political persuasion, I suspect you joined me in celebrating what America *says* it believes and the America we may yet become. Unattached to the old, worn out system of prejudice, attaching ourselves to a new ethos of colorblind hope.

And then Friday we lost our longtime and much-loved parishioner, Sam. Many years ago, Sam attached himself to our Lord Jesus Christ – and I do believe that at that heavenly banquet, Sam has found a new relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

Recently, though, we've also seen how attachment to place and power can literally kill both body and soul. The continued tragedy of Israel-Palestine may yet get worse – or, we pray, perhaps a new attachment to the God of peace may prevail, and our brothers and sisters will learn to live in harmony.

That sort of addiction, attachment to power, has led to the slaughter of men, women, and children in the Sudan, in Mozambique, in the Congo. The world is not right now a very pretty place.

And yet there is always hope. There is always hope that darkness will no win out. That light, once weak and barely flickering, may grow strong. That people of goodwill will arise and say, "Follow me." And that more people of goodwill will heed that call and do just that.

We must take care that we carefully, *very carefully* make our choices. Remember Jonah: he really didn't want to listen to God, and he ended up in the belly of a really big fish! Selecting – or rejecting – the call of a charismatic leader can lead to great goodness or great ill. And so we must choose carefully. We must discern the work of the Spirit, the traditions of our faith, the reason of good and holy men and women.

Make no mistake: Choosing to follow Jesus Christ is life-giving, life-affirming. Choosing to follow Jesus Christ is a choice for justice, compassion, and mercy.

Like Simon and Andrew, James and John, we must drop our nets, leave our attachments, and follow. And lead. And act. And embrace.

And justice - and love - will roll down like an ever-flowing stream.

Amen.