

‘Finding Spiritual Gravity’ -- Jan. 21, 2024

(Mark 1:14-20)

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” 16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (NRSVUE)

Have you ever imagined yourself bouncing on the Moon? Since Neil Armstrong made a footprint on the moon in 1969, eleven more astronauts have walked on the moon. Their walks were like bouncing because the moon’s gravity is about 1/6th of Earth, and that’s why the astronauts (and anyone) can jump about six times higher than they can on Earth.

If we look at them on video, they look like they are having fun, but their activities in space eventually weaken their body functions, so they are continually being helped by nutritionists and strength and conditioning specialists at NASA, who especially help them keep their bones, hearts, and other muscles as strong as possible while performing tasks in space. NASA also suggests that we can strengthen our bones and heart just by doing regular exercises like standing, walking, or jump roping!

Come to think of it, for the most part, we do not fall because our bodies are created and programmed to negotiate with gravity.¹ Gravity is so important not only to our body but also to our spirituality. That’s why Henri Nouwen reminds us that Jesus still calls us “to shift the point of gravity, to relocate the center of our attention, to change our priorities” in our worry-filled lives. According to Nouwen, “Jesus wants us to move from the ‘many things’ to the ‘one necessary thing.’”

For Nouwen, “Living a prayerful life is the only necessary thing. Prayer is the breath of our life. Spiritual disciplines are not ways to eradicate all our desires but ways to order them so that they can serve one another and together serve God.”²

It is important for us to realize that Jesus in no way wants us to leave our ordinary, busy world. Rather, he wants us to live in it, but to be firmly rooted in the center

¹ Mary Bond, *The New Rules of Posture: How to Sit, Stand, and Move*.

² Henri Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*.

of spiritual gravity. How? Jesus wants us to move our hearts to the center, shifting our spiritual gravity to God. As Nouwen said, “This change of heart makes everything different, even while everything appears to remain the same.”³

Passing along the beach of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fishers for people.” Simon, later called Peter, and Andrew didn’t ask questions. They immediately dropped their nets and followed him.

As Jesus went a little farther, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee’s sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Jesus called them making the same offer. James and John also followed him, leaving their father and everything else behind.

Those first disciples found the priority of their lives. Leaving their families, however, didn’t mean that they completely ended their relationships with them, as we see Jesus healing Simon’s mother-in-law who was in bed with a fever (Mk 1:29-31). They were still close to their families because Jesus’ ministry setting was not far from their homes. Capernaum, a fishing village located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, was the center for Jesus’ ministry.

Following Jesus, these disciples joined the movement of the Reign of God that Jesus preached and lived out.

In Galilee and beyond, Jesus was not a Mr. Nice Guy to many of his contemporaries. Jesus challenged the ‘purity system,’ voluntarily becoming a friend of sinners, and of those considered unclean or looked down on – the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized. People were born and raised in that system, and the living conditions and social ranks of the pure and the impure were very different. If you read the Gospels, you can easily find that what Jesus spoke and did was often perceived as blasphemy. The Pharisees asked, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” “Why are your disciples doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (Mk 2:16; 2:24). Those who believed themselves the pure and lawful were disturbed and angry at Jesus.

Jesus’ announcement about the good news became the turning point for both Jews and Gentiles to understand that God opened and is still opening the door to all people, especially those who were victimized in a brutally dehumanizing purity system. Jesus’ ministry has inaugurated the coming of the reign of God in which divine love, justice, and reconciliation are fully blown.

³ Nouwen, *Making All Things New*.

What can we do if Jesus calls us to follow him? How would you respond? What does it mean to follow Jesus today on the Cape, in Sagamore Beach? For some people, it could be committing themselves to a monastery for the remainder of their lives. For some others, it could be entering a seminary or joining a local pastor licensing school. For most of us, it could be “shifting our point of gravity, to relocate the center of attention, to change our priorities.”⁴

This Friday and Saturday, the New England Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, especially the Entrance Committee where I am a member, hosted the Ministry Exploration Summit for those who are beginning to explore their call to ministry, and those in the early stages of candidacy or discernment as well as experienced clergy and laypersons from the different ministry paths.

For some of them, it becomes a pivotal moment to shift their spiritual gravity, leaving their current jobs behind to pursue a formal ministry path. For others, it becomes a new journey to fish for people, whatever it means to them. For all participants, I believe the Summit became an opportunity to find, reaffirm, or shift their spiritual gravity, discerning God’s lead prayerfully, listening to where life is nudging them and calling them.

Learning and being equipped with practical information along with the spiritual presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Summit participants were also reminded that our spiritual and ministry journeys are all about what God’s doing in and through us. In a nutshell, all of us were invited to find spiritual gravity anew.

Jesus still calls us to follow him. How we respond will be different for each of us, but one thing in common would be setting our priority to God, finding, and shifting our center of spiritual gravity. Can we do that? Let us pray constantly and faithfully, trusting that God works in and through us as we try to shift the point of spiritual gravity, to relocate the center of attention and change our priorities.

We can do that because the Spirit of God breathes with us, prays deep in us, and empowers us. Jesus still calls us today: “Follow me!” And all God’s beloved say, “Amen!”

⁴ Henri Nouwen, Making All Things New (adapted)