

Radical Call
February 6, 2022
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“Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:1-11).

1. Turning Points in Life

What are your major turning points in life? A turning point happens when something or someone changes our direction in life. When I got married, when I came to the U.S., and when I went to seminary, my life changed 180 degrees.

This morning, we are going to look at the story of the three fishermen in Luke’s Gospel and the turning point of their lives after they encounter Jesus.

2. The Call of the First Disciples

Luke 5:1-11 tells us about Simon Peter, James, and John. They were fishing at the Lake of Gennesaret. This lake was also known as the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus is standing on the shore of the Lake and the people crowd around him to hear God’s message. Near the shore, there are two boats left by fishermen who had left to wash their nets.

Jesus gets into the boat that belonged to Simon and asks him to row away from the shore. Then Jesus sits down in the boat to teach the crowd.

When Jesus finishes teaching, he says to Simon, ***“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”*** Simon says, ***“Master,” “we have worked all night long, but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”*** Simon was an experienced fisherman and knew where to fish. And yet, Simon followed what Jesus said.

What happened next? Simon caught so many fish that the nets began to break. Simon signaled his partners in the other boat to come and help. James and John came and filled the two boats to the point that the boats began to sink. After the miracle, Simon fell down at Jesus’ knees and said, ***“go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man.”*** Why does Simon say this? Simon knows that the miracle he just experienced shows him the presence of God and that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus says, ***“Do not be afraid! From now on you will be catching people.”*** The verb “catch” means “catch alive” in the Greek language. The word implies “to save a life” or “to bring people into the kingdom of God and into a relationship with the Lord.” How does Simon respond to what Jesus says?

Verse 11 says, ***“When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”*** Jesus did not say to Simon, James, and John to follow him. Jesus simply says, ***“you will be catching people.”***

After they got lots of fish, we would think that Simon would have asked Jesus to join his fishing business. But instead of asking that, they decided to follow Jesus. This was a radical decision to live a new life with a new purpose. The three fishermen left everything they had behind. Their families would have thought they were crazy. Yet following Jesus was the best decision they would ever make. This is the turning point for them in response to Jesus’ radical call.

3. Using YouTube

The pandemic could be a turning point in life of the church. Two years ago, our church began using Zoom for online worship services. We still use Zoom today for Bible study and church meetings. Pastors and lay leaders throughout the New England Conference use Zoom for webinars, retreats and even for the Annual Conference.

Last December we began using YouTube as well to live stream the Christmas Cantata and our worship services. I realized that YouTube could be one of the best tools to reach out to people in the world. YouTube has been used by many people since 2005. Do you know how many people use YouTube? I’ve learned that 2 billion people use it.

We say that “the mission of the UMC is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” If we want the people to be disciples of Jesus, we need to go and meet people. But reaching out to others has been difficult during the pandemic. However, we are still able to engage others using innovation and technology to share the message of Christ. Small changes like these reflect the potential turning points for change in our world.

4. Are We Too Old to Respond to God’s Call?

When we talk about God’s radical call for our lives, we may often think that we may be too old to respond to God. The Bible reminds us however that God called many people throughout their lives to do great things for God’s kingdom in their old age. Abraham was 75 when God called him to leave his country and his people and journey to an undesignated land to become the founder of a new nation. Moses was 80 when God called him to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. In the New Testament, Simeon went to the Temple to take the baby Jesus in his arms and recognized the Lord in him. Anna also rejoiced seeing the newborn Jesus in her old age. She would probably be over 100 years old. The Bible tell us that no one is too old to respond to God’s radical call.

5. Conclusion

Simon Peter was a fisherman and a small business owner. He had other business partners that he worked with for years. Yet when he experienced the miraculous catch of fish with Jesus, he left everything to follow Christ. Why? It is because he realized that Jesus was the one that the Jews had been waiting for.

The three fishermen knew that following Jesus would be one of the most important decisions for their lives. They lived with a newfound purpose to follow after God. They would change the world for the rest of history.

6. Application

Last July, Christine and I met with Rev. Hakyung Cho-Kim. At the time, she said that she had a sense of call from God to write a photobook. In her hands she had a book entitled “Landscapes of His Grace: A Visual Devotional” written by Charles Stanley. She felt that God wanted her to write another book. Of course, she wasn’t able to finish writing and publish her book. Yet her sense of mission reminded me of the life of Paul. Paul says, ***“I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish***

my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). When she talked about God's call, I felt God was telling me to write a photo devotional book through her.

There are so many unfinished missions in the world. Isaiah 6:8 says, ***"then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"***

There is a board in the narthex that reads, "Wise men still seek him, listen and obey, worship and pray." I think Julia and Ruth made it. The reading reflects on the Magi who followed and found Jesus. I pray that we all may seek after Jesus, and listen, obey, worship, and pray. May we have a turning point moment like the three fishermen that we may follow after Jesus and may God receive the glory through our lives. Amen.