

Allen Pruitt

*As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,
he saw two brothers,
Simon, who is called Peter,
and Andrew his brother,
casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen.*

*And he said to them,
"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."
Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

Wait.

Just last week we heard a different story.
Today we hear from Matthew.
Last week it was John.
Last week,
we heard that Peter and Andrew
were both disciples of John the Baptist.

And in that story,
they were hanging out by the Jordan River,
perhaps assisting John with baptisms.
In that story, John says,
*"Behold, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world."*
And the two follow Jesus.
Jesus has to turn around and say,
"What are you looking for?"

In one story,
today's story,
Jesus finds them where they are,
calls them,
and they put down everything and follow him.

In another story,
somebody else tells them about Jesus,
and they follow after Jesus without another word.
The first thing Jesus says to them
is when he asks them,
"What are you looking for?"

Two contradictory stories.

But, when did two people ever agree on all the details of any story?

One thing all the gospels do agree on,
is that the first thing Jesus did,
before healings,
before teaching,
before any kind of miracle:
he called followers.

In the words of N.T. Wright,
*This Kingdom people,
called into existence by Jesus' announcement and invitation,
grew quickly into the twelve,
and has grown from that into a great multitude
which no one can number.*

*But it is still the same family,
formed by the Kingdom proclamation
and its accompanying summons,
formed of people who have seen the light
shining in the darkness...*

We see a lot of darkness,
don't we?
Our brains are wired to notice it,
to hold on to it.

The darkness is potentially dangerous:
maybe there's a tiger lurking just out of sight?
The darkness might be dangerous,
and so we get a little rush every time we hear about it.

Now, I'm not saying the evening news is manipulating us
based on our biology
- after all,
the people on the news are just people, like us,
drawn to the darkness,
to the fearful,
to the worries of the world.

People were no different 2,000 years ago,
walking around Galilee,
an out of the way part of the Roman empire.
They saw the darkness,
they held on to it,
they worried over the world
- just like us.

It's funny that Jesus,
in all four gospels,
that Jesus doesn't call any disciples
until AFTER John the Baptist gets arrested.

John has been a powerful prophet,
or at least a man who prophesied powerfully.
For him to be arrested,
and arrested for the things that he says
- against the king's immorality
and his treatment of the poor.

For John to be arrested was a sign of the darkening day.
The light was going out of the world
and the tigers,
the empires of the world were winning.

And out of this darkness,
Jesus calls people into the light.
The light of the world;
the light that shines in the midst of the darkness.

It's the same for us
as for them.
The same for me and you
as it was for Peter and James and John and all the rest.

Jesus calls us.

And it's a miracle that we show up.

Don't you think it's a miracle that these guys followed him?
*"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."
And IMMEDIATELY they lay down their nets
and they followed him.*

Talk about feeding the 5,000
or raising Lazarus from the dead all you want,
but getting these guys to follow a no name prophet,
and walk away from their livelihoods
on the hunch
that maybe this guy might be able to bring them closer to God
- well that's a miracle.
That's THE miracle of miracles.

And it's a miracle that we show up too.

Why?

Why do we show up?

Why do you show up?

Sarah Condon, Episcopal priest and author talks about it this way.

*We do not come to church because we get a gold star.
We come to church because we have tried everything else
and it turns out we continue to be exhausted
by the world and our lives.*

Church is a last-ditch effort for many of us.

It is what happens

before we start drinking more

or isolating more

or doing whatever it is that harangues us,

more.

*We all hold so much rage,
so much unwillingness to forgive ourselves,
and an outright refusal to forgive other people.
We are quick to yell,
to judge,
and to reject.*

*Because at some point in our lives,
those things happened to us.
And our coping mechanism was born.
We self-medicated
or chastised ourselves into numbness.*

*The idea of mercy or grace
in light of who we truly are
is often too good for people to believe.*

*Inviting people to church has to be done with very little control,
at least for me.
I do not have a script or a quota.
And I am not a very good cheerleader for Jesus.*

*I can only invite people to church
who seem to understand how much they need and want to be there.
And there is really no need to go looking for these people.
Jesus always makes sure I run into them.*

Jesus calls his followers in the midst of darkness.

He calls him to the light.

We aren't inviting people to church because they need us,
but because they need Jesus,
they need the light.

Because they need GRACE.

We invite people to church

for the same reason that we come to church:

not because we have some amazing program
or the best potlucks this side of my grandma's church
(though that is true).

We invite people to church

for the same reason we come to church,

because we recognize

that they are as tired of the world as we are,
they are as tired of the law as we are,
they are as in need of grace as we are.

And that's the only time they are going to say yes.

When we meet them,

our brokenness and theirs,
met together in the cross
and the empty tomb;
having a heart to heart
over a meal of bread and wine,

even though it's really just a cracker

and a sip of something you'd never serve at a dinner party.

But it is grace.

It is a promise,

that God will always be with us,
that God doesn't desire for us to be more perfect,
but to be more vulnerable,
more open,

and to tell the truth about how hard living really is.

And God,
the God who is the Word,
the Word who became flesh,
Jesus Christ
will listen.

And when we tell the truth,
when we say how hard living really is
- he will shake his head
with a rueful smile
and he will say,
with all the love and compassion
we could never even imagine,
Jesus will say,
“I know.
I know how hard life is.

Come, follow me.
I see your darkness.
I am the Light.”