

God's Purpose, Your Passion

Luke 5:1-11

James, John, and Simon. The three musketeers. They had known each other since childhood. Simon loved to hang around the docks, and as boys Zebedee would take them all out on the lake to learn how to fish. They had loved the feeling on being on the water, the smells, the breeze, it was all so perfect. So, it's no big surprise that they went into business together. They worked together to repair their nets, tend to the boats, clean the fish, take it to the market, keeping enough for their families. The fishing business didn't come with a lot of prestige, but they knew what they were about. At least, they thought they did.

Until that one bad fishing day when everything changed. They had worked all night long and had caught nothing. They were about to call it a day, and they noticed a large crowd approaching. All these people were following a teacher, Jesus, and they were all pushing and straining to get closer to hear what he was saying. As he approached the lake, Jesus sat down in Simon's boat, and asked him to just go a little bit away from shore. There Jesus taught the crowds from the boat. I wonder if as he was teaching, Simon was starting to feel something. The thoughts running through his head, admiration, inspiration, swirling around as he considered how he might want to take part in whatever mission this guy was on. When Jesus had concluded his lecture or sermon or whatever it was, Jesus asked Simon to go into the deeper water and let down the nets again. Simon was tired, his body ached from a night of failed attempts to catch anything. Yet, something about Jesus made him less certain about everything he thought he knew. So he let down the nets, and WHAT A CATCH! James and John had to bring the other boat out, and both boats were so full of fish that they were about to sink! Simon couldn't believe it, and yet he did. In his heart, things were changing. James and John felt it too. When they got to shore with their now dirty nets, boats filled with fish, all begging for attention, James, John, and Simon got up and walked away. Jesus calmed their fears, and invited them into this new adventure of catching people. They didn't pause long enough to conduct a cost/benefit analysis. They didn't measure the risk or even worry about what their family might say. They simply dropped everything and followed. They could feel a sense of calling and purpose. They heard a call that was probably a little terrifying, but also exhilarating, as they were chosen to be a part of this thing. Perhaps the things they knew that came naturally – working with their team,

making sure preparations were made, listening to nature, determination and patience even when the catch wasn't great, strength against voices that offered judgement, finely tuned awareness to their surroundings, strong family ties, willingness to be there for one another...maybe all of these things HAD prepared them for what lay ahead. There was so much that they DIDN'T know, but what they DID know was that the burning in their hearts since Jesus had approached their boats was something they couldn't ignore and couldn't live their lives wondering what if they had. So, they went.

There have been moments in my life when I've felt certainty that I was doing exactly what God called me to do and being what God created me to be. Then there are other times when I was simply working whatever plan I had in mind until I had the luxury of doing what God wanted. When I was in high school, I started working for a music company just outside of Nashville, working on school holidays and random Saturdays – sometimes answering phones and working reception, and sometimes filing, sometimes shredding. When I began college, I continued to work at the music company, working over the summer, and on days when I didn't have classes. I got to work in the Accounting department, with the operations staff, and even in human resources and the business contract team. There was one day that I spent 8 hours tearing the side strips off the old printer paper. I would care for the President of the company's kids when he and his wife went on trips, and it was as though I was a part of this family. However, as I neared the end of college, I increasingly was aware that this was a part of my life for a season and I would use the skills I had attained, but I was to move to Washington, DC following graduation. Telling my boss that I was going to quit, move to DC and follow God's plan for my life was not easy, and he was pretty confident that this was a colossal mistake, but I wasn't swayed.

I have had the privilege of knowing many people and hearing their stories of stumbling into their careers and discovering how much joy they get from doing their job. Last week at Kindred Spirits, we heard from a gentleman named Vincent who told his story of growing up with his grandparents and finding a real passion in working with seniors. He and his wife as nurses run an organization for home healthcare, and he takes personal interest in making sure their clients have rides from the hospital and to appointments, that medications, dietary regimens, and other instructions are understood and followed. Because he has zeroed in on something that he is skilled at and has passion for makes him radiate as he speaks

about it, and gives him life and job joy. Others have shared how their job is simply a job, but their real passion is met through their volunteer jobs, serving at a shelter, working at the hospital, walking dogs for a rescue, being a foster parent, making pasta and raising thousands of dollars for the church they love and organizations that impact our community...the list goes on and on, and yet some pieces of the story remain the same. The moment when we decide to lean into the callings of our heart – we taste abundant life.

Frederick Buechner says “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Our world is hungry. The state of our union is that we are a divided nation, struggling with our own fears so much that considering the needs of others is not a priority. Domestic violence, schools where our students fall through the cracks, melting ice caps which sends blasts of polar air southward, a decline in societal participation so that meaning is found through the internet... Whether your deep gladness or passion is for renewable energy, working with children, feeding people, responding to injustice, working with the elderly, or whatever, understand that you have been created by our God with a capacity that no one else has. This past week in Bible study we considered some of our gifts, and it came up that sometimes our gifts are things that we don’t even notice – because they come naturally to us, they escape our attention because we assume everyone can do that. So maybe you should ask someone who knows you well what some of your gifts and talents are – the places you find great joy, those tasks that aren’t work because you love them so much, the things you think about that others don’t seem to...and ask yourself if you are truly tapping into those passions, how are you putting them into practice.

Here are PRCC, we believe that it takes a village...or a whole church...and so we’d love to help match your gifts with a way to serve through our ministries here. Our Nominations committee begins meeting today, and we’ll be making phone calls to ask if you’ll be willing to join one of our teams...but you don’t have to wait for the call. Perhaps God has put something on your heart that you love and could offer this community. Let us know. Tricia Williams, Dave Kopolnek, Sarah McCarty, Karen Nelson, Naomi Siebert, and I are all ready to receive your input. (In the next couple weeks we will place a form in the bulletins for you to fill out as you prayerfully consider how God might be calling you in this time and place.

My friends, those fisherman thought they knew what life would hold, and then Jesus interrupted their day, inviting them to not fear, but to follow. Hear that invitation today, do not be afraid. You have been created and called, and as each of us lives into our God-given passion, we find abundance and joy like none other. May we have the faith of the disciples to answer the call. Amen.