

They left

Luke 5:1-11

February 7, 2010

They left ...

They pulled the boats up on the beach and they left -- everything. They left everything: boats, nets, fish, homes, neighbors, livelihood. They had just landed the catch of their lives but they left it all behind. Boats dragged up on the sand and left behind. Nets, untended and unwashed, left behind draped over the gunwales. Fish left behind some still flip-flopping in the bilges.

They left everything ...

But, of course, they could afford to leave. They were single men, unattached, free of family obligations, singularly able to drop everything at a moment's notice, not needing to answer to anyone but themselves.

Wait! You don't know that! Maybe they did have wives! And they left? Maybe some of them had children at home waiting for them. And they left? That's ... irresponsible! Inexcusable!

Or maybe they left because the timing was right. Business was slow. The local economy was in the midst of a long downturn. Maybe they were tired of working nights. Maybe they were tired of fishing. Maybe they were ripe for a change.

But you don't know that! They had one bad night, yes, but fishing was what they knew. Fishing was their way of life. How could they just leave? What about the people relying on their income? What about the people relying on their catch? And maybe there were other business partners. Maybe there were creditors to whom they owed money. What about them?

Maybe they were just young and impulsive, and maybe it was a different world back then, a world where young men might be expected to leave behind jobs and homes and families to run after an inspiring prophet or a charismatic teacher.

Do you really think so? Do you really think people in that day did not have similar ideas about loyalty and responsibility and duty and attachment as we have? Do you really think people in that day did not feel doubt and regret and loss as we do? Do you really think it was easier for them to leave? And why do we assume they were young? Why do we assume they were impulsive?

Maybe it's because we wouldn't do it. We wouldn't leave. We are too engaged, too invested, in our lives as they are. Our lives run in straight lines. There are no dramatic changes in directions, only minor course corrections along the way. Inertia and gravity keep us steady and grounded and safe.

We wouldn't leave. We have obligations, grown-up obligations, that we have happily embraced. We have families that count on us, friends that count on us, colleagues that count on us, neighbors that count on us. We don't just quit and leave! There are certain commitments that take priority above everything else.

Exactly! They left everything because, for them, following Jesus took priority over everything else.

Why? Why did that happen?

Or, maybe, the better question for us is, why not? Is there no passion that could excite us enough to set us off in a new direction and turn our lives upside down? Is there no person that could compel us to look at our lives, to look at life, in a wholly new light? Would we never leave anything for Jesus? Could we ever leave everything for Jesus?

Regardless of the ramifications and the risks and the costs, it makes me sad to think there is no love above all other loves, no adventure beyond all other adventures, no calling above all other callings, no holy passion, for which we would be ready to leave ... everything. Glory calls! But we are content to stay where everything is familiar, predictable, tame.

But they left. They left everything to follow Jesus.

Did they follow because they were amazed? They were amazed by what Jesus had done, by the huge number of fish they hauled aboard their boats when they set their nets at his request. But I don't believe they would have followed if it had been about anything other than fish!

They weren't moneylenders or tax collectors. They wouldn't have been impressed by talk of riches in heaven.

They didn't come to Jesus possessed by demons or lame or blind. They might have been amazed by his ability to heal, but they wouldn't have followed him for that.

They were fishermen and he brought them fish! Fish like they had never seen before!

This is the glory! This is the glory I see in Jesus. Jesus comes to us. Jesus meets us where we already are. He did call them away that day. He did call them to leave behind everything they knew, but first he came to them. First he asked them to do what they already knew well how to do, or thought they did!

This is the glory of our God! This is the glory Jesus reveals. The glory of a God who does not keep distant and aloof and hidden, waiting for us to come to our senses and look for him, waiting for us to read the signs and find our way to him. The glory of a God who comes looking for us, who finds his way to where we are. The glory of a God who comes, not to call us away from ourselves, but to call us to ourselves.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. He knew money. When Jesus called him, he learned how to put money to use to serve the Lord.

Simon and James and John were fishermen. They knew fishing. When Jesus called them, they learned how to fish for people.

The prostitute who came in tears to Jesus knew about making love. When Jesus called her, she learned how to love him and love herself in the way God meant for us to love and be loved.

What we are, what we know, what we do, matters. But there is something, someone, who matters more. Could it be that what we are, what we know, what we do, is meant as a gift for him, as a gift, through him, to each other?

There is one more application I want to make from this story before we are finished with it today. Doesn't it make sense that if Jesus goes to where the people are, we should do the same? But whenever we talk about evangelism, we talk about ways to get people to come to us! We do our best to try to make ourselves more attractive and inviting and welcoming, and then wonder why they aren't coming!

Jesus didn't build a new synagogue or put together a gospel choir or invent a new marketing technique or work on polishing his preaching skills. He didn't wait for people to come to him to hear the good news. He took the good news to them.

How could we do that? How can we be like Jesus? How can our energies be redirected from seating to sending, from attracting to incarnating, from marketing to witnessing, from church growth to church mission? How do we go, bearing the gospel, to where people already are?

You do understand that if we do that, if we do go to where people are as Jesus did, it will mean leaving where we are. It will mean leaving things behind. Maybe even leaving everything behind.