

Lent 1 - Wandering Heart: "Jesus Sought Me"

Luke 5:1-11

A sermon preached by Zoom for Plymouth Presbyterian Church,
St. Helens, Oregon on February 18, 2024

By Rev. Peter J. Blank H.R.

The hymn, "Come Thou Fount", says Jesus sought me when a stranger...

Here's a question for you: What do Moses, Isaiah and St. Peter have in common? I'll give you a hint:

Moses was keeping the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro, when he saw a burning bush that, oddly enough, wasn't burned up. He went over to get a closer look, and he heard a voice saying, "Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground." He not only took off his shoes, he fell flat on his face because he knew he was in the presence of Almighty God. Sure enough, God spoke to him and commanded him to go down into Egypt to confront the mighty Pharaoh and tell him the Lord said, "Let my people go." But, instead of accepting his marching orders and catching the first bus to Cairo, Moses feigned every excuse he could think of: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" he said. (Exodus 3:11) ... "They'll not believe me. (4:1) ... "I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (4:10)

Here's another:

The prophet Isaiah had a vision. It was in the year of King Uzziah. And in his vision he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Surrounding the Lord were the seraphim, which were prehistoric looking creatures with six wings and fierce red eyes. The whole place was filled with smoke, and the ground shook under his feet. Isaiah trembled with fear and cried out, "Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the

midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!” (Isaiah 6:1-5)

Still haven't got it? Here's one more:

Peter and his brother, Andrew, were cleaning their nets after a long night of fishing. As luck would have it, they came back empty-handed. Sometimes that happens. They were anxious to finish up and go home when along came Jesus telling people about the kingdom of God. There were so many clamoring to hear what he had to say that he climbed up in the bow of Peter's boat and spoke to them from the water. The crowd hung on his every word. When he finished, he looked over at Peter and said, “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.” Peter shook his head and said, “We've been out all night and didn't catch a thing. What's the use of going again?” Jesus just sat there. “Oh, all right,” Peter said, “If you insist, but I tell you, it's going to be a waste of time.” With that, he and Andrew loaded up the nets and pushed off. In no time, they were hauling in more fish than they knew what to do with. When Peter saw all the fish flopping around in the bottom of the boat, he fell to his knees and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.” (Luke 5:8)

So, what do Moses, Isaiah and St. Peter have in common? They all knew their unworthiness to stand in the presence of God, much less speak and act on God's behalf.

Jesus sought me when a stranger

They're not the only ones. Look at the disciples. When we take a close look at one of these twelve men Jesus chose. And I can tell you, not one of them was what you'd call a real winner.

- Peter was quick to speak and slow to think. He was constantly getting in the way, and, when the chips were down, he denied even knowing Jesus three times.

- Andrew, his brother, was a follower. Anytime Andrew was put on the spot, he'd defer to someone else and let them take the heat.
- James and John were egotistical and self-centered. Folks called them the "Sons of Thunder." They're the ones, you'll remember, who wanted Jesus to promise them seats of highest honor in the kingdom of heaven.
- Nathaniel never did a lick of work in his life. He was sitting under a fig tree reading scripture when Jesus first saw him. That's where he'd be today if he were still alive.
- And then there's James the Less. Does that tell you something?

I could go on, but you see what I mean: Twelve disciples. Twelve men of average to below intellect and ability. If you were conducting a job search today, I dare say none would show up on your list of finalists.

Yes, Jesus sought when a stranger...

And that's just the tip of the iceberg of Who's Who in the Bible. For example,

- Remember Adam? Nice guy, but no backbone. Does whatever he's told.
- And his wife, Eve. Good seamstress, but a rebellious spirit.
- Then there's Noah – great seaman, but known to over-indulge after a long cruise.
- Abraham – lies under pressure. Tried to convince the Egyptians that his wife was his sister.
- And who could forget David? A strong leader, but poor moral character.
- And his son, Solomon – exceptionally wise, but doesn't practice what he preaches.

The Bible is full of them. My favorite is the story of a Pastor Nominating Committee who was having a hard time calling a preacher. They'd gone through stacks of Personal Information Forms and conducted numerous telephone interviews, but they couldn't find anyone all that impressive. At the next meeting, one of the elders said he'd gotten a letter from an applicant they ought to consider. It read:

“Dear Sirs:

I would like to be considered in your search for a new pastor. I have considerable preaching experience and am the founding pastor of several new church developments.

In considering me, you need to know that I am not in the best of health. I have poor eyesight and limited mobility. I need the watchful care of a personal physician.

Also, if you conduct a criminal background check, you'll find that I have been incarcerated on more than one occasion. I have also been accused of starting riots, but that charge was never proven.

My strengths are evangelism and mission, though I must confess that my largest congregation was little more than a house church, and my most successful mission was taking up a collection for the saints back home.

But, if you're willing to give me a chance, I'll work hard to prove myself. Once you get to know me, I think you'll agree I'm not nearly as opinionated and outspoken as some say.”

The members of the committee looked at each other in disbelief. “You can't be serious,” one said, “Why this man would be nothing but a trouble maker and a financial burden. What's his name, anyway?”

The elder smiled and said, “The Apostle Paul.”

Jesus sought me when a stranger, the hymn says.

The Old and New Testaments agree: God chooses the least likely individuals to call his own and do his bidding. In fact, I don't know of a better way to describe the early church. Paul writes,

“For you see your calling, brothers and sisters,
that not many are wise according to the flesh,
not many mighty, and not many noble;
but God chose the foolish things of the world
that he might put to shame those who are wise.
God chose the weak things of the world,
that he might put to shame the things that are strong;
and God chose the lowly things of the world,
and the things that are despised,
and the things that are not,
that he might bring to nothing the things that are:
that no flesh should boast before God” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

God claims the least likely individuals as his children and gives them the authority to speak and act in his name, and they've all got one thing in common: They're not worthy. They're woefully inadequate. Their feet are made of clay.

Feet of clay, that's what my mother when say to me when I was getting a little out of touch with reality thinking myself as too smart for my own good. “Remember, you have feet of clay!”, she would say.

No one has to remind us of our shortcomings. I bet you could list any number of reasons not to be called a child of God, yet here's the deal: God knows you, warts and all, and claims you anyway. What's more, God gives you the inspiration of his Spirit, the knowledge of his Word, and the strength of his grace and love.

“There is no one righteous; no, not one,” Paul told the Romans. (Rom. 3:10) Nowhere is this made clearer than in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, where we're invited to partake of these symbols of God's

grace, not because we're deserving, but because God has made a place for us at the table.

Like Moses, Isaiah, Peter and Paul, we are not worthy, yet God loves us just the same and invites us into fellowship with him through Jesus Christ.

Like Peter and Andrew standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee cleaning their nets, we could list a dozen reasons why Christ ought to choose somebody else to represent his kingdom here in St. Helens, Oregon. But, you know what? God's not interested in our excuses. And so, he says to us today, as he said to Peter so long ago,

“Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch”—and don't be afraid.

It's not about fishing. It's about trusting the power of God to use you in all of your unworthiness to introduce your neighbors to a friend, Jesus Christ, and usher in his kingdom in this time and place.

Well, don't just sit there, do it! Put out into the deep. Risk introducing someone to your friend Jesus this week. Invite them to come to church with you next Sunday. You won't believe the catch that's waiting for you.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in a God of abundance—

**a God who sees possibilities where I cannot,
and who holds onto hope when I am at the end of my rope.**

I believe in a God who comforts—

**a God who says, “Do not be afraid;”
a God who joins me in life's deep waters.**

I believe in a God who invites—

**a God who says, “Follow me,”
and, “You will be fishers of people.”**

I believe in a God who seeks after me relentlessly and persistently—

**a God of second chances and boundless mercy;
a God who calls us by name.**

We believe.

Help our unbelief.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.