

# EASY DECISIONS AND HARD PREACHING

*The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME*

Sunday, January 26, 2020

Scripture: [Matthew 4:12–23](#)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Through Advent, I spent a lot of time asking us to see the “Christ” in Jesus, the spiritual message of God’s presence in creation that is contained in, yes, the sweet Christmas Eve story of the baby in the manger... But as we finish every Christmas Eve... that same story was there “In the beginning...” long before Jesus. It is mystical and kind of beyond understanding.

In this season of Epiphany, I want to invite us to go the other way: It turns out that Jesus, the teacher and leader of people... yes I think there’s a lot about his very being that can tell us about the mystery of God... but there is a whole bunch of spiritual genius in his teaching which is meant to be understood, to be wrestled with, to be followed.

Today, we’ll hear how Jesus begins to teach, first gathering the followers that will walk with him and

You’ll hear a familiar theme of his preaching... and see an amazing response... and maybe we can wonder about what comes next...

## SERMON

When have you just “gotten on the bus?”

If that phrase doesn’t immediately connect with you... it’s a personal phrase of mine for the kind of change or turn that we see today: in the disciples... and, I think, in Jesus.

When I was 13, my high school girlfriend’s mom threw up her hands and said, “That’s it, You can’t sit on my couch anymore, you’re helping the boys at their show tonight.” The boys were her sons, Jonny and Steve Rodgers, and so I joined a band, first tuning guitars and lugging gear, and then playing in bands, and then leading tours... For the longest time, my world was a 24 foot winnebago with eight of my friends and couch that I slept on (with a hollow bottom that could fit amps and guitars) and my life fit in a 1 foot by 1 foot by 3 foot storage cabinet above that couch where I slept.

Years later, it occurs to me: I never decided to do that. I just *got onto the bus*.

At the time, I think I thought it was fun... a new adventure with friends, playing music.

A lot of time in the middle? I thought that this was a terrible mistake. That I had given up all sorts of normal life that would have made me happier, more adjusted, I don't know... it just would have made me someone who was good at sleeping in places where all my belongings weren't directly above and below me, or the spiritual practice of standing still, or relationships with people who weren't on the bus... and I was pretty sure that would have made me happier or healthier. And if you asked me then, I would have told you, I've made a terrible mistake.

In the end, it might have been the magic of that instant response, which gave me the energy to carry on through the challenge and make sense of it all on the other side.

And I have to tell you, though I would have laughed at you if you tried to tell me that there is a line that goes directly from that journey to ministry and the deep sense of calling and commitment that I get to enjoy in my ministry still... but there is.

So you. When have you just *gotten on the bus*?

I bet you, no matter how wondrous the beginning... there was a middle that was really hard.

The disciples know this. Jesus comes, and comes, by the way, preaching John the Baptists's message... Jesus is literally picking up where his cousin left off. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near." Jesus comes, and the disciples barley have to think. They drop their nets, and off they go. They do not have a lectio divina practice... there is not a clearness committee... they don't pray about it first... heck, they don't even ask poor dad what he thinks.

Repent, he says. "Turn around." Or more precisely, "be changed." Jesus invites them, and us, into an upside down life.

Not a bizarro, reversed life, not whatever is happening right now in our culture or our politics, that seems like our discourse has devolved to shouting at one another that red is blue... Not a world devoid of truth or principle... but a world in which we discover we must re-orient ourselves so that the justice and love of God is the center rather than the many things that long for us to center and worship them instead, that what we clutch for safety often endangers our souls, whether that be wealth, or comfort, or...

"Be changed," says Jesus. And the nets fall to the ground. The nets, pretty fancy equipment that meant that these fishermen had some investment in their business... they had even inherited a boat from dad. There was a lot of privilege and comfort there in their hands... and yet they let it go.

It was so true that the disciples (who didn't yet know that they were disciples) don't even seem to think about it... they just *get onto the bus*. And the decision was easy... and the life that came afterwards? What came after? Was unimaginably hard. There's a reason why we talk about 12 disciples and not 12 hundred.

The good news is that there are LOTS of ways to be a disciple... we don't have to take up fishing, just to quit fishing...

We DO have to find the thing that draws our love and energy towards God's call... and then we have to ride that bus through all the tough stuff to the fullness of transformation in the Spirit.

Last weekend was Rev. Dr. King's holiday. I'm sorry that you missed a chance to hear Jim Gertmenian: I'm sure the word he was going to bring you fit into the line of that ministry we celebrate, and that has been taken up by The Rev. Dr. William Barber, who is, I think, one of the most profound teaching and calling voices of our time... on the day this year, noting that sometimes our celebrations of Rev. Dr. King often miss the heart of his ministry, Dr. Barber said this:

*The best way to destroy and distort the legacy and message of a prophet is to pretend they were perfect or popular.*

*Truth is, you really don't honor prophets with celebrations. Prophets trouble us all*

*You honor prophets by going to where they died, and picking up what they were working for, and carry it on... - The Rev Dr. William J. Barber II<sup>[1]</sup>*

I think this is a temptation in celebrating prophets... but also a limitation of our own ministry we can fall victim to: the wonder of calling and the joy that often comes with it... well, when things get hard we may be tempted to give it up. But the ministry that called disciples on the beach was not a pathway that would be perfect... and it certainly wouldn't be popular.

We can be so tempted to limit ourselves, our callings to those things in which we know it will all work out, or not lose us any friends... but that is not the radical turning and changing that Jesus invites... if we are called to love and justice, we can not turn away when God's love asks us to wrestle with hard questions of welcome and inclusion, we can not turn away when justice calls us to question economic justice or racial justice beyond our own experiences.

We are called to *be changed*. Not for a season, but for a life... through the joy of calling, but also through the challenge and struggle on the way... knowing that what lies ahead is life, and life abundant in Christ. Amen.

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1. <https://twitter.com/RevDrBarber/status/1219132335343443968> ↩