

Getting in Step  
 Genesis 12:1-4 ~ Mark 1:14-20  
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“You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and you shake it all about. You do the Hokey Pokey and your turn yourself around, that’s what it’s all about.” Remember the last stanza of that roller rink classic, Hokey Pokey? You put your whole self in, you put your whole self out.” (Don’t worry; I will not demonstrate that one.) Why the Hokey Pokey here, now? Because our gospel lesson today is about four men: Simon and Andrew, James and John who decided to follow Jesus; two sets of brothers who put their “whole selves in” starting with their feet. And we know what happened next: Jesus turned their lives around, ultimately reshaping the world around. Yes, that’s what it’s all about.

But how do we get started on the journey of faith, and how do we stay on it? How do we really stay in step with the One who calls to us each and every day, “Follow me”? As we ponder these questions about Jesus’ call to the disciples and to us, I will focus on the response side of the equation today. I see two important moves the fishermen made, that we also must choose to make, if we want to follow Jesus.

This is not the first call story in our Bible. Not by a long shot. We see these moves in the first call recorded in our Bible, God’s call to Abraham, in Genesis 12, the Old Testament lesson that Larry just read. And we find these same moves again, about 1900 years later, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus, taking a page from God’s book. Jesus: Staying in step with the ongoing dance of divine revelation. What are these moves?

The first move is the *way* Jesus calls, recruits, invites, cajoles--*by giving the potential disciples the big plan, but withholding any specific details*. I call it the, “OK, But what’s for lunch?” aspect of the way God works with us and through us. When those guys took the bait (pardon the expression) and went off with Jesus, they must have had a sense that they were moving in the right direction. They took a leap toward a relationship and a new life they could not resist. But I’m sure their minds and guts were swirling with questions and doubts, misgivings and fear: “What exactly have we gotten ourselves into? And what do we do next?”

When God called Abram (his original name), our scriptures tell us God called Abraham into his lead role in God’s plan with a striking lack of detail. All settled in Haran [Hair’ un] with wife Sarai, and nephew Lot, God said basically “Go and then I will show.” Big call, big promises, with a shocking lack of detail—“I will show you the land, I will bless all families through you.” And we are told simply, “So Abram went.” But there was so very much Abram and those fisherman by the Sea of Galilee, didn’t know, couldn’t know.

Yes, when God calls us into action, when God invites us to dance, it can be very scary. How do we know when we get a crazy idea whether it is coming from God or somewhere else? If you get an impulse to do something that seems right and good, some act of compassion or justice, but your heart starts pounding, or your palms get a little sweaty—there’s a good chance that the voice you’re hearing is God’s. As the theologian and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor has written, “If you really want to follow Jesus, do something that scares you every day.”

Going, without knowing, takes faith. Bucket loads of it. But all we need is a mustard seed portion to get in step. Of course, if it were just up to us, we’d get the full plan before we committed, wouldn’t we? No jumping ship until we really know what we’re getting into. Unless its Jesus we’re trying to follow. Eugene Peterson, [Presbyterian author and translator of *The Message Bible*] in his book, *The Jesus Way*, explains it like this: “When we follow Jesus, it means that we don’t know exactly what it means, at least in detail. We follow him, letting him pick the roads, set the timetables, tell us what we need to know, but only when we need to know it... When Jesus says ‘Follow me’ and we follow, we don’t know where we will go next or what we will do next. That is why we follow the one who does know.”

Getting in step with Christ definitely involves stepping out on faith. There’s no way around it. But there’s something else we need to look at. The second move that happened that day by the Sea of Galilee, and way back in Haran. This second move is the “*letting go*.” *Letting go* of something, someone, or some idea, in order to get in step with God’s call.

In our Mark’s story, Simon and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their boat, and their father. In Genesis, Abram left Haran but he *did not* leave his family behind. He took his wife, Sarai, his whole family and his nephew’s family, as well as their slaves and possessions with him. Following God’s call does not necessarily call us away from our families. But we certainly see it in the parting of James and John as they grab their hats and run off to points unknown with Jesus. Perhaps now that I’m way closer to Zebedee’s age and perspective, I look at this story from his eyes—Zebedee watching both of his young adult sons running off on some madcap whim with that charismatic upstart prophet, leaving behind the nets that still need mending and leaving the family business in jeopardy. James and John were not the only ones “letting go” in this story.

Another word for “letting go” is sacrifice. It is a major theme in Jesus’ teaching, Jesus’ life and death on the cross, as well as the story of Abraham who is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, his only son of Sarah, Isaac; the only son through whom God’s promise was to be fulfilled. Hard stuff. And it doesn’t get easier with time. “Letting go” or sacrificing our own idea, our plan, our way, life as we think it should go, when Jesus calls us to do otherwise, in my experience, keeps being hard. It is rarely (if ever) our first thought, or our first instinct in the heat of the moment. But “letting go,” sacrificing our need to control is what Jesus calls us to do to become the people and the world Jesus came to save.

My husband, Bob, will verify this truth: I am kind of hard to dance with. I do love to dance, but I struggle to follow when we try to do couples dancing. I'd rather take the lead. It takes trust, it takes "letting go" and being willing not to know. Getting in rhythm with God, means letting the Lord of the Dance lead us, a step at a time.

For us today, I hear this second move, this second step, not only about major life decisions, like today's story about the four fishermen who left their boats for a new calling, but also on a daily discernment level. To follow Jesus day-to-day, calls us to keep letting go of certain ideas and expectations we wake up with every morning. Getting in step with God's way calls us to decide what not to do on our "To-do" list. This is a hard one for me, a person who is blessed (and cursed) with having way too many ideas and plans. Yes, I make lists that are impossibly long at the beginning of every day. Getting in step with God's way calls us to decide what *not* to do, on our "to-do" list, whether it's a list on a paper, a screen, or in our heads. Things that may be good things, but *not* the most important things from God's view.

I hear the "letting go" part of Jesus' call rising in urgency, especially for the church today. It is easy for us to get distracted with good projects and get out of step with where God wants us to go. As Jan Edmiston, Co-Moderator of the General Assembly of the PC(USA) has said, the questions any church should be asking are (1) Did Jesus die for this? And (2) What breaks God's heart in this community? Acts of compassion, working for justice in our own community and beyond takes enormous energy, intelligence, creativity, and resilience. Therefore we must ask ourselves: what are the things we need to let go of, or do less of, or do differently to be the hands and feet of Jesus in Marshfield in our world today?

I find it important to point out that these call stories are *not* about men behaving badly and who then saw the light and repented of their sins. No. This story is not essentially about sin and redemption. These men were doing their duty, faithfully supporting their families, doing the work into which they were born. This "letting go," this sacrifice was a choice to sacrifice one good thing, for the better thing that God was now calling them into.

I believe this kind of "letting go," reaching out, stepping out of our comfort zone in the name of Divine Love, sacrificing our comfort and/or our control, is the kind of move that we face daily. Trying to hear God's call among the many good options that we may be blessed to choose from. This applies to us as individuals and families, and also as a church. We are a church blessed with great energy and multiple ideas. Which do we need to let go of, and which do we need to double-down and go for broke in order to follow Jesus with all our might and muster?

I have a story to share, written by Rodger Nishioka, my doctoral advisor, Presbyterian pastor and professor, a story that helps us to see how this "getting in step" on the daily discernment level can work. It is a story about a young man

named Jonathan, a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, and about another teenager named Clarissa. This is how it goes:

“Throughout the weekend retreat, Clarissa had pretty much hung around the fringes. Part of the problem was the site. Clarissa was a paraplegic and wheelchair bound. She had a motorized chair, but not all the sites around the campus were easily accessible to her. It was more difficult for her to be a part of the retreat than for others. Beyond that, Clarissa’s personality was introverted. She seemed to enjoy watching more than participating. I wasn’t sure if her being in the wheelchair determined that for her or if her nature was simply to be more shy.

“Throughout the weekend, young people and adults made numerous attempts to draw her in. She smiled, but would more often than not politely refuse. We had several nice conversations, mostly around mealtimes... We all ended up asking her questions to try to draw her out, and even then, her responses were curt, brief, and not very revealing...

“The retreat ended with a dance on the last night. It was the only activity, and everyone came. Clarissa, true to form, was sitting in her wheelchair along one wall. She was looking bored. Then to her surprise and mine, one of the young people in the group, Jonathan, a young, energetic, and somewhat immature ninth-grader, jumped out from the dance floor and yelled to Clarissa, “Let’s dance!” Before she could object, he rolled her onto the dance floor. Jonathan was behind her, pushing her and twirling her. I could see her face, and initially she looked terrified. In the ebb and flow of the dance floor, when people realized Jonathan and Clarissa were dancing, we made a circle around the two of them with everyone cheering and clapping. Jonathan was obviously having a great time. Clarissa was less obvious. Then as the circle broke up and Jonathan and Clarissa continued to dance, I saw a genuine smile on her face and heard laughter from her for the first time the whole weekend.”

In that moment, on that dance floor, the Kingdom of God was at hand. As Jonathan followed Jesus, feet first, pushing Clarissa into the middle of the dance floor at just another awkward, sweaty, exciting and scary teenage dance, before their very eyes, with their pounding hearts, it became holy ground. You and I know those moments are precious and fleeting, yet they can reshape everyone who lets that experience inside them.

Friends, Jesus is forever inviting us to step further into his holy presence. Jesus is inviting us to get in step, or back in step, on this road that has no dead ends, this path that leads to life not only for us, but for all creation, in this life and the next. What about you? What about us? What might be that step for you today? What might be that step for us as a church?

Our Immigration Task Force met on Friday to ponder next steps in reaching out to our immigrant community to build on the learning and momentum of the “Know Your Rights” workshop we held last month. Speaking of “Hokey Pokey” and

roller rinks – what about stepping out and having a second Sunday service on Sunday early this Spring at the roller rink in town? Seems like something Jesus would do.

How is Jesus calling us to put our whole selves in? Just imagine if we were to let go and follow...