

Drop Everything

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This is one of those stories that I never understood.

Two brothers, out a ways in their boat hauling in the days catch, when suddenly this man they have never met before walks up out of the blue and says.

“Follow me. I will make you fish for people.”

And without a moments hesitation, or a single word, they drop what they are doing and follow him.

Other Gospels make the story even more extreme. Simon and Andrew don't just abandon their nets, they leave their own father stranded out in the boat by himself.

Now, I don't know about you, but I would have had a few questions.

“Follow you where?” or “What do you mean, fish for people?”

Or even just, “And you are...?”

But no. The story make the point abundantly clear. Immediately. They left their nets and followed him.

No questions. No hesitation.

A moment that is made all the more striking if you know that in exchange for that choice to follow Christ, both Simon and Andrew would breath their last breath, as Jesus did, on a cross.

They may not have known it then, but they cast their lot in that day with a revolutionary band whose leader, and most of his followers would be executed by the Roman Empire for sedition.

So why did they do it. Even if they didn't know where it would lead, considering the risk of joining any movement, why did they drop everything immediately, and follow him?

To be sure, it was in part because Christ seemed to glow with a sort of intangible quality of power and trustworthiness. If the accounts in the gospel were to be believed, his very person was mysteriously magnetic.

But there is another reason why they stood up and followed Jesus.

The alternative was intolerable.

And in order to explain to you why, I first have to confess that in preparing for this sermon I actually read an academic journal article entitled “The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition.” Which in its abstract, says it will build on the promising research of

Oakman and Hanson into the economics of first century Galilean fishing.

Some people have too much time on their hands...

But no, Hanson et. al. should take heart because their research has made it into at least one Sermon.

It turns out that fishing was a particularly difficult way to make a living while Galilee was under Roman occupation. And it all had to do a decree that all the waters of the Empire rightfully belonged to Caesar. Which meant that in order to even go out onto the water to fish, one had to have leased the rights to fish in those waters from the Emperor.

That lease was a sunk cost, but it's not all. A large hierarchy of client kings and local governors, and other local officials who were, to varying degrees corrupt and enriching themselves off the labor of the

poor, also extracted taxes and tolls that could quickly wipe out large portions of a days catch.

And as if to rub salt into the wound, those taxes in large part went to pay the salaries of soldiers who were occupying their land.

This meant your typical Galilean fisherman started each day in a deep hole and worked backbreaking labor in a system that was stacked against him to try to at least break even, with maybe, maybe enough left over to feed himself and a family.

Each day a fresh toil, in the hot sun. Dirty work, kind where the smell never quite washes off.

And then one day Jesus walked up and said, “follow me.”

It is an important reminder that from the very beginning, some of the most powerful expressions of faithful living have been made by those who have few other options left.

Those for whom the world as it is has become intolerable.

I think of the many, many, heroes of our faith long ago — and up to this present day— who cry out in the streets, and in halls of power, for peace, for justice, and for love.

A few years ago I visited El Salvador with some friends from Seminary. It was a bit of a study trip, but also something of a pilgrimage, to the chapel where, in March of 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated by a rightwing death squad while he was standing in the pulpit preaching.

During our trip, we met in a simple storefront office of an organization called COMADRES, the Mother's of the Disappeared. COMADRES is

a group of about the most fierce and powerful women you will even meet. Women whose sons were kidnapped and likely killed by government forces during El Salvador's civil war.

Even when the fighting was still fierce, and bombs were falling, these women were out in the streets every day marching with photos of their children and demanding justice.

They all wore black dresses and white handkerchiefs on their heads and held placards and banners bearing photos and names of the disappeared. They carried photos of their sons, and signs that read, "¿Dónde están?" Where are they?

I remember one of us asked a question about where they found the courage. And one of the older women in the circle simply said. ¿Qué más podemos hacer? What else can we do?

The world as it was had become intolerable. And so when those earliest organizers of COMADRES came to each other and said follow me, they dropped everything and went. What else could they do?

The alternative was intolerable.

So perhaps now we better understand why those early fisherman were so ready to walk away.

And I am sure we can understand why those women in El Salvador marched in the street every day.

But most of us live in a relative comfort and safety. Most of our lives are unlikely to become intolerable anytime too soon.

And yet we are follower's of Jesus who taught us to feel intense solidarity with all people, especially the poor and marginalized. Jesus who said "whatever is done to the last and the least, is done to me."

That challenge to us is to see that whenever our neighbors are threatened, whenever war is brewing, or hatred is boiling up. Even if we are comfortable, the fact of injustice anywhere must be intolerable.

It must be so intolerable that we will drop what we are doing. And follow Christ. Who calls us to a new way of peace, of justice, and of love. And who calls down a risky road. One that we cannot quite know where it is leading. And one that might cost us something dear.

Wherever there is injustice, wherever there is hatred, wherever there is violence, it must be so intolerable that we will drop everything, to will write in, and speak out, and march. To lift our one small light into the darkness, and join it with so many others to light up the night.

That is what it is to be a disciple. To follow the One who taught us solidarity with the most vulnerable, who taught people to live with a love deeper than they had known was possible, who healed the sick,

and fed the hungry, who spoke the hard truth with firm love to the powerful, and who bore the cost of it all.

That is the one who said to Andrew, and to Simon.

And who says to each of us.

“Follow me.”

