

Calling Problems

: **Jonah 3:1-5, 10** **Mark 1:14-20**

We begin with questions that inevitably come to everyone—and may be arising in your mind right now in the circumstances of your life.

Are you making the right choice?

Is this what you should be doing?

What if I've made a mistake?

Making choices!

The art of deciding— on a certain path or identity!

Answering a certain call—even an important phone call, much less a call to a certain kind of work or passion—are complicated matters.

We are led to believe, by Mark—I call him “Mister Immediate” because everything that happens and everything everyone decides or does is –in Mark’s gospel—preceded by the word IMMEDIATELY

Including the idea that those first fishermen disciples just “left their boats” and followed Jesus.

Hmmmmhhh.....

Didn't have to be more difficult than that?

They had work to do. Jobs to hold down. Fish to catch. Fish to clean. Fish to sell. Fish to cook.

Peter had a mother-in-law who was ill.

They had family fishing business partners counting on them.

And then there was the rolling thunder cloud of danger hanging over all of them as a result of the “*If They Come In the Morning*” arrest of John the Baptist

The prison cell John would never leave.

These fishermen had to come up with their goodbye words, face the farewell embraces.

Decisions about what to take with them and what to leave behind.

What about their wives? Their children?

If you dig deep enough, this whole enterprise of “taking up their own cross and following Jesus”—is almost impossible to understand.

But we’ve all been there in our own way.

What am I contemplating doing?—Is this a crazy idea?

This is much too hard.

Am I really capable, right now, in this moment, of beginning to live my way into a new identity?

This work is ridiculously impossible.

Why am I even thinking about doing this?

I don’t have the faintest idea what I am doing, yet here I am—God help me—doing it.

If the disciples in Mark’s brief account take us inside this difficult calling journey—Jonah is the poster child.

Doing what he senses God wants him to do is repugnant to Jonah

I’m supposed to go help those heartless, faithless Ninevites change their ways?

Not my problem, God.

You’ll end up forgiving them.

And I say, ‘The heck with that.’

I have better things to do in Tarshish.

Maybe Jonah should have taken the option of going to Nineveh!—rather than end up in the belly of a whale.

Even when he does finally make the trip—it turns out just as he expected.

The Ninevites repent. God forgives them.

And Jonah winds up under a tree, grumbling and grouching about it.

Talk about “Calling problems.”

But who knows. I mean Jonah’s life presumably goes on.

It could be that ten years later, the reluctant prophet looks back and realizes that whole episode was the most meaningful journey in his whole life up to then.

He was completely alive.

He was living with passion, even if some of his passion was deep indignation.

Maybe it was his deep, dark indignation that taught Jonah **how to love**.

In my world—and I suspect your world as well—we are being called all the time—by phone, by text, by email, by messenger, by personal visit.

And we’re being called to all kinds of things.

We’re being called into conversations.

We’re being called to work.

We’re being called away from what we were doing.

Should I have a child? Should I try for that job?

Should I move?

Should I stay put?

Should I compromise with this person or situation?

Or should I take a stand?

Either way, how will I put it into words?

In one of Paul's most well known letters, he says "Faith, hope, love abide, but the greatest of these is love.

What if love were your persistent measure of how you answer this significant call you think you might be receiving?

Elizabeth Alexander, African American poet, wrote in ***Praise Song for the Day***,

What if the mightiest word is love?

love beyond marital, filial, national.

Love that casts a widening pool of light.

Love with no need to preempt grievance.

Love that embraces doubt about what in God's name you should do, even about your suffering and pain.

Shouldn't we let love walk us across all the unknown landscapes of our lives.

Follow your joy!

Follow your bliss, said famously, Joseph Campbell.

Maybe that's what the disciples were doing when they left their boats.

They'd fallen in love with Jesus.

They were following their bliss.

Have you ever loaded your doubts and hurts and misgivings into a carry on bag and begun following your joy?

You too are a disciple.

Which means you are a student, a pupil, a researcher into the mysteries of life....vocation.....love.

Do not think of this idea as some grand, impossibly abstract thing.

Think of it as the way you talk with the people you spend the most time with in your life.

Or think of it as how you deal with exhaustion, even pain and misery.

You are studying love.

You are studying the subject of loving yourself.

You are being called into the community of your own complex, complicated, life.

And you are being called out to create community with whomever and whatever you meet during your journey, even through a single hour or day.

I think that in order to do this, you have to take some chances.

You don't take a leap of faith. You leap into faith.

You check your inner compass, determine what direction it is you are leaping in, and then you leap into your own sense of fidelity and love for what and who you want to become—again not necessarily for your whole life, but just this hour, this day, this week.

I wanted to go somewhere out of the city last week. From midtown, I've found the fastest way to get out of Dodge is to head west and north toward the Missouri River over near the Legends. In less than hour, even 30 minutes, depending on your destination—reach Weston Bend State Park, the Presbyterian Camp beyond Parkville, or Wyandotte Lake. We went to Wyandotte Lake. There we had an experience that we've had maybe 2-3 times in over fifteen years—seeing rivers of snow geese pouring across the sky and eventually converging into an immense cloud

of birds, honking at each other—the sound and sight an extraordinary force of nature.

Ten minutes before this, there was nothing. Ten minutes after. Nothing.

But we'd put ourselves in a place to be on the lookout, just in case.

The call of the wild, as Jack London put it.

What's your call of the wild?

Where do you need to go—who do you need to see—who do you need to love—to answer the call that is meant for you?

Lately, I've been studying for a play that I'm collaborating on writing with Jacqee Gafford. If it were a novel, it would be called historical fiction. For one of the scenes, I'm setting up a dialogue between the great Howard Thurman, who enthusiastically incorporated the arts into his worship services in the chapel at Boston University, and Hazel Scott, the greatest jazz pianist of her time, a movie star, the first African American to have her own television show, and, evidenced by a remarkable internet video, a rare performance of playing two grand pianos at the very same time. Look it up: Hazel Scott/Two Pianos. 90 seconds of joy.

I found about her when a message popped up on my phone, “Whatever Happened to Hazel Scott?”. I thought it was going to be some tragic end—and despite her great success, including making what was then a million dollars a year—she did experience many setbacks: her movie career was suddenly ended when she launched a strike over Black female actors being wrongly dressed as maids in a movie where she was the star. Her marriage to a famous congressman ended in an unhappy divorce. Her television show was cancelled when she was called before the House of Representatives about subversive activities, her main subversive activity being that she refused to play before segregated audiences. This led to a nervous breakdown, yet Hazel lived inside her

music and kept true to the deepest within her, and went to Europe with her child to continue her unrepeatable career.

She said one of the lights that lived within her was her grandmother singing “Gentle Jesus” to her at nap time.

Are you making the right choice?

Is this what you should be doing?

Who is calling your name?

Let me close by expanding on that thought.

Have you ever sung the great song—*Hush! Hush! Somebody’s Calling My Name?*”

Key lines in the text goes like this:

Hush! Hush! Somebody’s Calling My Name?”

O my Lord, What shall I do? O my Lord, what shall I do?....

Sounds like Jesus, somebody’s calling my name

O my Lord, what shall I do? O my Lord, what shall I do?

And then:

I’m so glad troubles don’t last always

O my Lord, what shall I do? O my Lord, what shall I do?

Following Jesus is a calling!

And if you decide to answer that call, “*Follow me, I will have you fishing for people.*”—you should try to figure out what you should be doing.

Whether you are just starting, or if you have been on the adventure for awhile, you need to find your ministry, your great work.

Everybody in this church should wrestle their way into some ministry that reflects your choice as to how to answer Jesus' call.

Your call may change. Great!

New adventures in following the Savior.

Don't we need the Savior now?

The Savior needs you now.

Jesus sent someone to fish for you.

We're all doing the best we can to become for Jesus—fishers of people.

Amen.