

Psalm 62:5-12

62:5 For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

62:6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

62:7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

62:8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

62:9 Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

62:10 Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

62:11 Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,

62:12 and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

Mark 1:14-20

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

1:16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.

1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

1:19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

1:20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Proclamation of the Word

What makes a family get in a boat and not knowing where they are going, flee to the hope of safety, not the surety of it? The situation they leave behind must be worse than anything they may face, even starvation, drowning, death.

Why would you choose to leave? People must be desperate- desperate to feel safe, to be fed, to be free.

This summer during my Sabbatical I will visit Lindesfarne, England. It's called Holy Island, where Christianity entered the Anglo Saxon world in the 6th century was kindled by monks committed to Christ's service. That's my "holy" reason for going. It is also the near the birth place of my Grandfather, Norman Wearmouth who boarded the ship, the Celtic, as a 7 year old, leaving before that more

famous bigger, sister ship the Titanic left port in 1912. He came with his parents Robert and Meggie, and sister Sarah.

He was from County Durham- lots of coal mining. Durham is sort of like the WV of Northern England- rich in history, but full of poor people. Meggie "trained for service"- meaning being a maid. Picture Downton Abbey. Robert was a farmer. An economic Depression occurred after the turn of the Century and a migration began. My family was looking for a better life, ready to escape the class system, and knew America would afford them a chance to move up from working class. In England they would never own land. Tenant farming was not cutting it. Like many immigrants to the U.S., my great grandfather worked in landscaping, planting the palm trees at the famous Hialeah Racetrack and Casino in Miami, Florida. I've seen photos. It looks like something off the TV show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, hosting famous folks from Sir Winston Churchill to Bing Crosby. Robert Wearmouth, my great grandfather, was one of the gardeners, but it was better than being broke. His children were fed and educated in public schools.

I am not sure what prompts someone to get up and go leaving behind all that is familiar and known. When I put myself in their shoes and all the generations before us, what made them drop their nets, leave the boat, and family, the familiar?

Something better was beckoning, even if only the hope of it.

Of course others among us came to this country against their own will, herded onto slave ships as a commodity, a part of economic engine. Separated from family and sold to the top bidder. Others fled their countries as refugees, persecuted, and the U.S. became a safe harbor.

I imagine you have heard family stories over the years. I would love to hear your story sometime. Martin Luther King, Jr. is quoted saying, "*We all came on different ships but we are in the same boat now.*"

When I think about people leaving a bad situation for the hope of better, I go back in my mind to a walk in the Sonoran desert I made in 2007 with our friends from *Frontera de Cristo* on the border between Douglas, AZ and Agua Prieta, Mexico. Our Presbyterian Mission workers, Mark and Miriam Adams, serve on our behalf at the border building relationships through Christ among neighbors living on both sides. One of the afternoons our group of youth and adults took a walk in the desert with a heat index of 110 and no water source. We saw traces of human desperation: a child's abandoned shoe, a baby bottle, and plastic bags containing necessities. I know that they have found human remains although we did not see them that day.

Dana will visit *Fontera de Cristo* in February with a delegation from Foothills Presbytery. I am excited for him, but know that these images will haunt you, too.

I met border agents, Christian migrants, families who have fled violence in Central America. Our church, through those disciples, has a ministry of reconciliation that Paul discusses in 2 Corinthians 5.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

Because I have seen these people and this place with my own eyes, I will never see the "Border Debate" in the same way, especially as a Christ follower. For me as a Christian, it is not just a policy debate; it is about God's children. It's about people, sometimes very desperate people.

In order to go, to leave your home, there has to be something better, or the hope of it, beckoning you on.

When I used to read the gospel from today, I always thought how brave of these first disciples leaving behind all they loved, a good job, family and friends. I like to imagine that the disciples were so in love with God and Jesus that they were willing to just drop everything and go, sort of Jesus' Spiritual Super Heroes risking it all in faith....but I wonder...

What if they were desperate, desperate for new life, leaving behind something worse, for something better?

I wonder if the disciples were desperately ready to get out of that boat, get away from the headaches of taxes and regulations, the back breaking work of casting nets and hauling fish sun up to sun down. They were not fishing for recreation, but eking out a living.

The first four called disciples may have heard call to be Kingdom Fishermen as the way for a better life. So they get out of the boat, drop their nets, and take off with Jesus. Dr. Robert Williamson, Jr., professor of Religious Studies and our Bobby, who grew up here at Fort Hill, writes:

"Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Many Christians read Jesus' call to discipleship as though he were a representative of some heavenly Fish and Game Commission, inviting us into a lifetime of sport-fishing for lost souls, scooping up people like mackerel and tossing them into the ice chest of salvation. Yet Jesus was not a bass pro, and the gospel is not a competitive sport. Jesus has something far more profound in mind.ⁱ

Scholars and Historians help us see that the world in which the disciples lived and Jesus walked was ruled by the Roman Empire. Indeed, fishing was one of the major economic activities in the Galilee during Jesus' time. As such, the Roman Empire tightly controlled the fishing industry through a series of high taxes and licensing fees, which together functioned to extract wealth from the laboring classes and transfer it to the imperial elites. Dr. Williamson tells us that because they had day laborers helping them, the sons of Zebedee were not the poorest of the poor. James and John walked away from the family business in other words. They sense an urgency moving toward something better than can be

imagined. So they leave to follow Jesus to God knows where and live on God knows what. They are walking by faith like many who have left home hoping for a better life.

And even though our translation reads, "you will fish for people" as if fish is a verb. In Hebrew it really means you will be "fisherman for people" casting your large nets wide to see who might be found and brought into the fold to know the God who loves them and seeks their well-being. Not just "**scooping up people like mackerel and tossing them into the ice chest of salvation**" not only concerned for the spiritual, but for the whole person: mental, physical, spiritual, emotional. So they are not fishing just for converts, they are "Fishermen FOR people." They are FOR people who have become burdened by the Empire and all its demands. The particular net Mark refers to is large with weights drawing any and all it can. The disciples seek the welfare and care of people- first and foremost, sharing the good news and experiencing the Kingdom come near. They are following Jesus into a ministry of healing the sick, casting out demons, inviting others to a life of faith and trust in God as the Psalmist sings,

62:6-8 The LORD alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus was always looking out for people. His disciples are called to be Fishermen FOR People.

A call to follow Jesus is a call to repent and change. And to be fishermen for people, we see each one's intrinsic worth, their God worth, not their self worth. We are therefore called to be a part of Kingdom economics and work for the well-being of all people, as God intends it. When Abraham and Sarah were called, they were promised that through them all peoples and nations would be blessed. To follow Jesus is to be on a kingdom mission which supports abundant life for all God's people and that means working for the flourishing of humankind and creation.

Jesus invites us into a new way of being, following him, even if we do not leave home.

Imagine how you will follow Jesus this week.

- What boat are you afraid to leave, drawn to the seduction of its security?
- What boat are you ready to leave so that life may be abundant, fuller, more meaningful?
- How will you and I, we the Church be Fishermen FOR people? For others?

Perhaps we follow by becoming a nurse. Perhaps we follow by volunteering at the Our Daily Bread or Family Promise. Perhaps we follow by looking out for those in our schools who always seem on the outside and invite them in. Perhaps we follow by doing a job we love as best we can to help others. Perhaps we follow by doing a job we hate but contributes to supporting our family and helping. Perhaps we follow by listening to those around us and responding with encouragement and care.

Perhaps we follow by caring for an aging parent, or special needs child, or a young person who needs a mentor. Perhaps it means marching for people without rights.

Following takes many forms, but it is always specific, and always FOR people, for others. Our brother John writes in 1 John 4:20 CEV

"But if we say we love God and don't love each other, we are liars. We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don't love the people we can see?"

Yesterday in Jazzercise class, I remembered what I learned as a child from my dance teacher. When dancing you cannot look down at your feet or you will stumble and the other dancers will run into you. You cannot look around you to your sides, or you will miss your mark. You must spot- looking ahead at where you are going to move in the right direction. Keep your eyes trained on where you are going.

When we hear the call to follow Jesus, we have no idea where we are headed exactly. We could look down and around stay stuck in the boat, not ready to get out. We can look ahead to the future, overwhelmed, afraid, not sure what may happen.

I think the key is to keep our eyes trained on Jesus. Jesus is our spot.

When we train our eyes on him, and our feet will go in the right direction.

Benediction

We are sinners who are saved, saved for service. So keep your eyes on Jesus and your feet will follow in the right direction. The Kingdom of God will be visible among us.

ⁱ Robert Williamson, Jr., *Fishers for a New Kingdom, Mark 1:14-20*, at www.politicaltheology.com/blog/fishers-for-a-new-kingdom-mark-114-20-robert-williamson-jr/