

The Calling of Peter

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[0 : 00] Good morning, my name's Tommy. I'm the rector of Church of the Advent. So on behalf of our church, welcome. Especially if you're joining us for the first time, welcome to you. I have heard reports from the women's retreat that's currently underway.

I think many of our, some have come back, but many are still there. But I've just heard rave reports, just incredible times spent in the Psalms, incredible times of prayer and fellowship. So we should just give thanks for that, be praying for them as they make their way back today, but I think it's just been an extraordinary time.

My wife is there. She just said it was fantastic. So next time there's an opportunity, if you didn't go this year, I strongly encourage you to go the next time there is an opportunity. Once we go beyond the essentials, like food, water, shelter, there's a growing consensus that perhaps our greatest need as human beings is the need for meaning.

The need for purpose. Viktor Frankl famously discovered this in his experiences in a concentration camp during the Holocaust.

He discovered that the thing that made the difference, the thing that determined whether or not people could endure the horrors of the concentration camp was whether or not they were able to find meaning.

[1 : 20] Was there something that gave their life meaning in the midst of that meaningless suffering? Carl Jung, not a Christian, discovered something similar.

He famously wrote that out of the hundreds of patients, adult patients he treated, he says every single one of them had problems stemming from the fact that they had lost what he called a religious outlook on life.

And by that he means they had lost any sense of greater meaning or purpose. He said every single patient had problems stemming from that and every single patient required a solution that included recovering that sense of meaning in life.

The point is this, if we want to be resilient, if we want to psychologically and emotionally thrive and flourish, we need a sense of meaning.

We need something to aim our lives at, something bigger than ourselves. Now, of course, people find meaning in all kinds of things, in social causes, in politics, family, kids.

[2 : 29] But the reason that we have this longing for meaning, the underlying reason, is because God created us with a purpose in mind. And our problem as human beings is that we have become disconnected from God's purposes for our lives.

All of that leads us to the account that we're looking at this morning in Luke chapter 5. Because when we see a conversion story in the Bible, like the one we see here in Luke chapter 5, we need to understand that this is about much more than just someone adopting a new belief system or a new way of life.

It's about much more than someone simply getting saved individually. This is what it looks like when someone regains their sense of purpose.

It looks like, this is what it looks like when someone is reconnected to their God-given purpose. This is a story of a normal, sinful human being who gets swept up into the great unfolding story of God's renewal of all things.

And the New Testament writers include stories like this in their accounts partly to show us what is possible for people like us. So we're gonna look at this account this morning and we're gonna focus on aspects of this experience, this encounter, that would apply to anyone in this room.

[3 : 57] Four aspects of Peter's call that would apply to every single person in this room. So let's pray and ask God to help us as we seek to understand his word. Lord, we thank you for your word

and we thank you that we're not just dealing with human wisdom here.

We're not just looking at good advice. These are the words of the living God. These are words that you as our creator speak to us and that because of your Holy Spirit, through your son Jesus Christ, Lord, these words have the ability to recreate us, to remake us and renew us from the inside out and to bring us face to face with the living word, Jesus Christ.

That's what we need this morning, Lord. We pray that by your spirit it would happen. In Jesus' name, amen. So the first thing that I want us to notice as we look at this encounter between Jesus and Peter is this.

Now this is a quick point, but I think it's an extremely important one. This is not Peter's first encounter with Jesus. It's easy to miss that because what you have to do is you have to line up the chronology between the four gospels, between the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John. And when you line them up, you realize that actually Jesus and Peter met a year earlier. We read about that in chapter one of John's gospel. Peter's brother Andrew gets to spend a full day with Jesus.

[5 : 20] At the end of that day, he's freaking out. He's like, I've never met anybody like this. And he runs and he finds his brother, Peter, who's at this time going by the name Simon. And he says, Simon, you got to come meet this guy.

He's going to change your life. And he brings Peter to meet Jesus. And when Jesus sees him, he says, you are Simon, son of John. You shall, and then he says, from now on, you shall be called Cephas, which means Peter, rock, right?

He renames him. And at that encounter, it's very clear that Jesus is speaking prophetically about Peter's future as a leader among the apostles. And there's clearly an invitation to follow him there.

But from everything that we know, Peter doesn't respond right away. And a full year passes. And then Jesus comes back into town.

He goes to Simon Peter's mother-in-law's house. She's sick. He heals her. And then he comes down to the shore where Peter has just wrapped up a long, fruitless night of fishing.

[6 : 24] encounters him once again. And then he gets into his boat. Right? A year has passed. So it's no coincidence that it's Peter's boat that Jesus gets into.

Jesus is pursuing Peter. He's gently, graciously pursuing him. And so the first thing that we want to notice about Peter's call is this, is that when someone comes to faith in Jesus, when someone is converted, as we say, that is always a response to God's gracious pursuit.

It is always a response to God's gracious pursuit. What we need to understand is even though Peter commits to following Jesus here, he leaves everything to follow him.

If you look down the road in Peter's life to Jesus' crucifixion, Peter abandons him once more. He abandons him once more.

He goes back to his old life. He denies knowing him. But even then, Jesus doesn't give up on Peter. He appears after his resurrection on the beach after another long, fruitless night of fishing and catching nothing.

[7 : 36] And then Jesus does what? He reenacts the exact same miracle. The parallels are striking. And he forgives Peter and he reinstates him as an apostle.

So here's what this means and why it's so important. I think this gives tremendous hope, at least to people like me and maybe people like you. Some people have dramatic conversion stories like Paul on the road to Damascus where Jesus appears, blinding, flashing light.

Entire life changes in a moment. And if you have had that kind of experience and I know people who have, then praise God. That is amazing for you. But quite honestly, that has not been my experience. My own journey has been a bit of a mess to be totally honest.

It's been a lot of switchbacks, a lot of curves, a lot of fits and starts. I grew up and as a young child, I considered myself a Christian, was baptized at age 12, but then I walked away from the faith.

I lived and called myself an agnostic all through high school, all through college. Then I came back to faith. God brought me back to faith in a very powerful way. But even since then, you know, I've had times where God felt unbearably real and close and I've had long periods of doubt, dark nights of the soul as we call them, where frankly, I had times where I wasn't sure what I believed.

[9 : 04] Now I'm a priest. I can't imagine doing anything else with my life. I love what I do. But as I look back, no matter how far I drifted, no matter how many doubts crept in, no matter how much I

struggled to figure out what I believed in the face of something that I had experienced, Jesus was always there.

He was always with me. He has always pursued me and he has always called me back to himself. And here's the point I want to make. Unlike other religions and philosophies, our hope as Christians doesn't rest in the strength of our commitment to Jesus.

All of our hope rests in his unwavering commitment to us. Right? So if you're here and you're not a Christian, like it or not, Jesus is pursuing you.

If you're here and you were a Christian but you're leaving the faith, you're deconstructing, you're not sure what you believe, you're in a period of doubt, a dark night of the soul, Jesus is pursuing. And he will not give up.

Even if you've rejected him, he's not going to reject you. Even if you've given up on him, he's never going to give up on you. He's going to continue pursuing. Anytime somebody comes to faith in Jesus, it's a response to God's gracious pursuit of us.

[10 : 30] That's the first thing we want to see here. The second thing we see in this account flows out of that. At some point, a response from us is called forth.

Verse one tells us that the reason Jesus gets into the boat to teach is because people are pressing in all around him. They want to hear his words. Imagine he's down on the shore of the lake and people are pushing in so much that he's starting to get into the water.

There's no room to stand on the shore because everybody wants to hear. There's no microphones back then and everybody wants to hear what he's saying. And so, for very practical reasons, he gets into the boat and turns it into a floating pulpit, goes out in the lake so he can teach from the lake.

But what we see in these crowds is interesting here. These crowds kind of represent, these are people who are curious, these are people, they've heard things that Jesus has done, they're wanting to see for themselves.

But we know the context if you look at the broader story and we know that these crowds are very fickle. And as soon as Jesus begins to say things that they don't want to hear, many of them are going to leave and turn on him.

[11 : 40] So after Jesus is done teaching, he turns to Peter and he wants to know what is Peter's response to my word going to be? So he tells Peter, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

Now this is daytime. Everybody who knew anything about fishing knew that nighttime was the best time to catch fish. By this time, Peter is discouraged, he's exhausted, he's been out fishing all night, he's not caught a single fish.

Now I'll tell you this, I love to fish. I'm not good at fishing, but I love it. I love going out there, I love throwing a line in the water. But I can tell you this, if you ever encounter someone who has been fishing for hours and caught nothing, the absolute worst thing that you can do is to offer them unsolicited advice about how to catch a fish.

The worst thing you can do, especially if you're talking to a career fisherman and you're not a career fisherman, right? You're a carpenter, you're a rabbi, you're not a fisherman.

So Jesus offers this unsolicited advice and based on everything Peter knows as a career fisherman, Jesus' request makes absolutely no sense. It's the worst time to catch a fish and you want me to go out in the deepest part of the lake and drop my net down there.

[12 : 54] These are heavy nets, at least 100 feet long, super heavy. This is backbreaking work. This makes no sense. You know, in fishing, there's the 90-10 rule, right?

90% of the feeding fish are in 10% of the water, meaning most of the water out there is empty.

There are no fish. And Jesus is like, go right there. Makes no sense.

But look what Peter says. He says, Master, we toiled all night long and took nothing. But, at your word, I'll let down the nets. And then end up catching more fish than they can possibly handle.

Takes multiple boats. See, there comes a time when if you want to grow in your faith, if you want to go beyond what you see in the crowds, this kind of fickle interest in Jesus' words, this noncommittal, fair-weather faith, you have to recognize that the words of Jesus are not simply advice.

They're not just food for thought to go into the hopper along with all of the other input we get about how to live our lives. You have to begin to recognize these are the words of the one who made us, the author of history, the one who knows infinitely more than we do about what we need.

[14:14] And so there comes a point when you have to decide, am I willing to say yes to Jesus even when it doesn't make sense to me? Even when what he's asking me to do doesn't make sense from my perspective at all?

Even when it's inconvenient, even when it's costly. Am I willing to say yes anyway? Now, that can look a lot of different ways. Maybe it means you forgive somebody who has not asked for your forgiveness simply because Jesus says, I've forgiven you and I want you to go and do the same. Doesn't make sense, but Jesus, if you only knew what they did to me. But you do it. You say, at your word, I will forgive. You know, maybe it means giving money to somebody who needs help when it puts you at greater financial risk simply because Jesus calls us to do that.

You know, we were talking this morning in our adult Sunday school class about the fact that there are people in our community who are gay and because of their relationship with Jesus have committed themselves to living a celibate life.

And we were talking about this and we were saying, you know, in the eyes of the world, that doesn't make sense at all. It sounds crazy. And it's incredibly costly.

[15:29] But you know, a person who has made that kind of, said that kind of yes to Jesus, quite frankly, knows a heck of a lot more about what it means to follow and trust Jesus than most pastors.

Now sometimes, saying yes to Jesus, that leads to immediate blessing. Right? You say yes to Jesus and immediately you get the big catch of fish. Many times though, it's not so easy.

Many times that blessing that comes from saying yes to Jesus, it doesn't come for a long time. In some cases, it may not come in this lifetime. But if you have never said yes to Jesus, even when it didn't make sense, if you look back on your time as a Christian, for those of you who are Christians, and there was never a point where you said yes, not because it also aligned with what you wanted to do, but you simply said yes, even though you didn't understand the command.

If you've never experienced that, then I guarantee you have never experienced that kind of profound peace that comes from letting go of our attempts to control what we can't control and handing our lives over to the one we can trust.

Right? Even better than ourselves to know what we need. There's a peace that comes with stopping the attempts to control the uncontrollable that can only be found when you say yes to him.

[16:54] So following Jesus is a response to God's gracious, gentle pursuit of us. And it means saying yes even in the cases where it doesn't make sense to say yes.

And then along with this, the third thing that we see in Peter's journey is that as we get into relationship with Jesus, as we follow Jesus, part of the journey means a growing awareness of sin. You know, Peter says yes to Jesus. He ends up catching more fish than he's ever caught in his life. And his reaction is fascinating. See, I would be jumping up and down, cheering, yelling, taking a bunch of pictures, telling everybody I know.

That's what you think he'd be doing, but he's terrified. He falls to his knees and he says, depart from me for I'm a sinful man, oh Lord. This is the same reaction, by the way, that we see in the Old Testament reading.

If you remember a little while ago, we read about Gideon when he sees a manifestation of God and he recognizes that this isn't just a prophet, this is actually a manifestation of God's presence.

[18:00] His response is to say, alas, oh Lord God, for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. He's terrified. He thinks he's gonna die. And God responds, peace, you're not gonna die.

Think of the prophet Isaiah, same thing. Isaiah sees God and then cries out, woe is me for I'm lost, for I'm a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. He thinks he's gonna die. The point is this, the holiness of God illuminates the truth about our sin.

In the presence of that kind of holiness, everything about us is exposed. and that is terrifying. It's terrifying to be in the presence of a holy God.

Peter realizes he's in the presence of someone far, far beyond a mere human and he's terrified. Only God has that kind of authority over nature.

[19:05] The holiness of God illuminates the truth about our sin, which means the more we grow in our relationship with Jesus, the more clearly we see his holiness, the more clearly we see our sin.

See, it goes together. The more you see the holiness, the more you see your own sin. And what you begin to realize is that sin is a lot like an onion. When you become aware of sin in your life, you become aware of some way that you're rebelling against God, then ideally if you're a Christian, you

repent.

You turn away from it. You give it up and you embrace the grace of Jesus. So ideally, that's how you respond. When you do that, you're peeling back a layer of the onion.

But in time, the holiness of Jesus begins to expose the fact that there's more sin underneath.

There's another deeper layer. And that's where you need to go. And there's more repenting that's required.

So I'll give you an example, not from our church, from some other church. Here's an example from another church. A guy who, not a Christian, but friends with some people who go to the church.

[20 : 12] And he's kind of known as a player, womanizer. He has this pattern of pursuing, flirting, giving lots of attention to a woman. Then he physically hooks up with her. And then once that happens, he ghosts her.

And he moves on. And he has a pretty bad reputation for this kind of behavior. Then this guy comes to faith. And almost immediately, he repents of all of that behavior.

I shouldn't have been treating women that way. I shouldn't have been doing that. And he repents of it. So all the hooking up, all the sexual stuff, he repents of all of that. And he gets really involved in the church.

He gets really involved in the ministries of the church. Gets really involved, dives fully in, joins a small group. But then over time, people in the church begin to realize, people who are friends with this guy begin to realize, you know, he's given up all the sexual stuff.

He's given up all the hooking up and all that's gone now that he's a Christian. But they start to notice that every time this guy gets into a group, whether it's a ministry team or a small group, he always has to dominate. He talks the most.

[21 : 12] He always has the answers. Right? He always wants to be the one to come up with a plan. He tries to force himself into leadership at every opportunity. And these people begin to realize, you know, it was never really about the sex and the hooking up.

Under that, there was an idolatry of power and control. Right? You peel back one layer, but underneath, you realize, all that behavior with women, it was about conquest. It was about control. And you begin to realize, this guy has a deeper layer. He peeled away an outer layer, but there's a deeper idolatry of power that needs to be torn down. It needs to be torn out. Now, that kind of thing is true for all of us.

The specifics differ. The idols differ. The behaviors differ. But that kind of thing, the layer that you peel back and you see a deeper layer and you peel that back and you see a deeper layer, that dynamic is true of every human being.

So the more we follow Jesus, which means seeing more of his holiness and more of our sin, the more we have to peel back the layers and go deeper and deeper into the reality of our sin. This is why the great Frederica Matthews Green, Eastern Orthodox spiritual leader, says this, the first time Jesus appears in the first gospel, the first instruction he gives is repent.

[22 : 36] From then on, it's his most consistent message. In all times and every situation, his advice is to repent. Not just the scribes and Pharisees, not just the powerful, he tells even the poor and oppressed that repentance is the key to eternal life.

The more we see the holiness of Christ, the more we see our own sin. The more we see our own sin, the more we repent. And that means we experience more and more of the grace of Christ. Right? That's how we grow. We see sin, we repent, we experience grace. And then it goes deeper and deeper and deeper. And guess what? The grace goes deeper and deeper and deeper as well. So mature Christians who have been at this for a long time are eager to repent because there is nothing like that experience of grace on the other side of repentance.

So we see that this is a response. Peter is responding to God's gracious pursuit. Peter reaches a point in his relationship with Jesus where he's willing to say yes even when it doesn't make sense.

[23 : 45] And then in the presence of the holiness of Jesus, he grows in his awareness of sin which prepares him to be a recipient of grace. Jesus responds with tremendous grace.

And in Jesus' response, he doesn't just forgive him, say peace, say don't be afraid. We see the fourth thing. Jesus then gives him an entirely new understanding of his purpose in life.

What we might call a kingdom-centered vocation. A kingdom-centered vocation. See, this encounter ends with Jesus saying do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching men.

Or he literally says you will be catching people alive. You will be catching lives. And Peter, James, and John leave everything and follow him. And we need to be really careful here that we don't miss the meaning of what's happening here.

This doesn't mean that when you become a follower of Jesus, you have to leave your career behind and go become a full-time missionary. Now, some people read it that way. But there's nothing in the Bible, I would say, that suggests that that would be normative for Christians.

[24 : 56] Certainly, all Christians are called to share the gospel, right? But I don't think this is about leaving our career behind. I think this is a challenge and it challenges us to rethink our own vocations in light of the kingdom.

Jesus says, I'm here. I am the kingdom of God. Come. I'm breaking into this world. And as a result, your job, your role, your vocation is going to be transformed.

It's going to be expanded. It's going to be deepened. You're going to get hitched to something so much bigger than yourself that you're going to have to entirely reimagine your vocation in light of the kingdom.

That's what's happening here. You know, God had created and gifted Peter to be a fisherman. But Jesus challenges him to go beyond simply focusing on fish. How can your gifts and talents and abilities be used in service of the kingdom of God?

You know, I had lunch with someone just this week in our church. This is a person who's gifted and wired to create and implement systems. A person who's really good at setting goals and then leading teams of people to accomplish those goals.

[26 : 02] He's done this professionally for years. Now he's asking this amazing question, what would it look like for me to use these gifts and talents and abilities to put them to use creating systems that will help our church become more effective in our mercy ministry once we move to Shaw?

Right? That's a wonderful question to ask. God has given me this vocation. What does it look like to think of this vocation in light of the kingdom and what God is doing here in the city? We all have a God-given vocation.

Whether or not you have a job, paying job, or a career, you have a vocation. You know, you have a particular way that God has wired and gifted you to serve in this world simply by virtue of the fact that you're a human being.

For most of us, I would say that leaving everything to follow Jesus doesn't mean quitting our jobs. It means, here's the leave everything part, it means you no longer focus only on financial security or status or achievement as the goal.

It means that you begin to aim higher than that. It means that you begin to see your vocation as a way to serve and bring glory to Jesus, a way to put the gospel on display.

[27 : 17] You know, this is what the apostle Paul is talking about in Colossians chapter 3.

Whatever you do, work heartily. Ask for the Lord and not for men. Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. And listen, I know some of you really need to hear this. Some of you have struggled with unemployment. You're looking for a job right now. And if you don't have a job, especially in a place like D.C., you can feel like your whole life lacks meaning.

You know, regardless of your politics on what's happening right now in the federal government, I know a lot of you work for the federal government. And I know some of you have either lost your jobs or you're worried about losing your job. And I know that some of you have received communications that are calling into question the legitimacy of your vocation.

Right? Some of you are weathering people who are asking, questioning whether or not what you've given your life to has any meaning or value whatsoever. And when that happens, regardless of the circumstances, when somebody questions your vocation, right?

Somebody, people move to D.C. and work for Peanuts because they want to feel like they're making a difference. And when somebody comes along and says, I don't see any value or worth in anything that you've given your life to, that is extremely wounding.

[28 : 29] Right? So for anyone here who for any reason doubts the value of the work that you do, the value of your vocation, I want you to know this. God sees everything that you do.

God sees everything that you do. And God delights in seeing people do what he created them to do. He delights in that. He delights in that.

And by the way, his opinion is the only one that really matters. So this is what it looks like, friends, when someone, a normal, sinful human being, gets caught up in the great unfolding story of God's renewal.

It means recognizing that Christ is pursuing us even now, no matter where you are in your faith. It means at some point there has to be a willingness to obey Christ even when it doesn't make sense. It means a growing awareness of sin, which is the hard part, but that also leads to greater experiences of grace. There's nothing like it.

[29 : 36] And then it means a kingdom-centered vocation, reimagining your vocation in light of the fact that the kingdom is here breaking into this world and Jesus is making all things new. And how are you called to be a part of that?

We were made for something bigger than ourselves. And that purpose can only be found in Christ. Let's pray. Our Lord, Heavenly Father, we thank you for these truths.

And we ask, Lord, we pray that these wouldn't just be ideas that we consider, but that this would be truth that sinks into our heart, whatever is of you, through your spirit, and that it would renew us from the inside out.

Lord, that it would kindle in us a hope and a passion, that it would awaken in us a desire to rethink and reimagine all of our lives. Lord, to see what it means to be enfolded into your great purposes, to be connected in, to rediscover why human beings are here and what we were made for.

Lord, we pray that in that we would find our deepest, truest meaning. Lord, I pray that you would give us each a vision for what it looks like for us to participate in your renewal.

[30 : 54] Lord, in our lives, here and now, in this place. I pray that you would give us a clear vision of what that means. We pray this, that not only for our good, but that we might glorify you, that we might bring praise to your name.

And it's in the name of Jesus that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.