

February 22, 2015
Peter
Peter's Calling
Luke 5:1-11

Opening words: Lent is the liturgical season that runs prior to Easter. Excluding Sundays, which are considered "Little Easters", it lasts forty days. It starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Saturday of Holy Week. This year, Ash Wednesday was February 18 and Easter is April 5. For the devout, Lent is a time of penitence and prayer. It is a time to turn to God and discover the person He intended you to be from the very beginning. It is not a second chance at forgotten New Year's resolutions, it is a time to give up the things that are holding you back from a closer walk with Jesus.

This year's Lenten sermon series is called *Peter*. I have selected him for several reasons. The first is the amount of information we have about him. The Gospels are filled with many stories. For this reason, many connect with Peter. The second is his transformation. Within those stories, we see his spiritual progress. He began as a confused follower and ends as a true leader of the early church. Time does not permit us to look at all of Peter's stories, but we do have time for five. Each one happens prior to the events of Holy Week and reminds us of Jesus's divine mission. We begin our series in the first eleven verses in the fifth chapter of Luke. Let me call this message *Peter's Calling*.

Luke 5:1-11 ¹One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,^[a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

We begin our study of Peter in the Gospel of Luke. Never forget that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are companions. There are many similarities between the two. The Greek structure is identical. Both are written to the same person, Theophilus,

"one who loves God." The author of both is Luke. He was probably Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, and physician by profession. He was also the one who accompanied Paul during his second missionary journey. He penned these words in the city of Rome about the year A.D. 70. His work is exhaustive. Standing side by side, Luke and Acts covers Jesus's story from his birth to his ascension. His point is clear. Jesus was the vital piece in God's plan of salvation for the world. However, what is more important to me than all the exegetical understanding of the book is the simple truth that no one can tell a story quite like Luke. His stories are perfect. You wouldn't want to change a single word. This morning's story is a perfect example.

We are in the fifth chapter of Luke. It is still early in Jesus's ministry. Jesus is born in chapter two. Jesus is baptized in chapter three. Jesus is tempted in chapter four. In our chapter, Jesus begins to call his disciples. According to the text, Jesus is standing near the Sea of Gennesaret. The other Gospel writers call it the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is not just there to admire the view. Jesus is there talking about the Kingdom of God. A crowd is listening to him, when the Master notices two fishing boats. They are temporarily abandoned by their owners, who are washing their nets, preparing for the next day. There is nothing unusual about that scene, it happened daily. The crowd continues to grow and Jesus runs out of room. He gets into one of the boats, the one owned by Simon, and asks him to pull out a little from the shore. He is close enough to be heard by his congregation. When the preaching is over, Jesus begins to talk to a single individual, Simon. Jesus requests that he pulls farther out so they can lower the nets one more time. Simon, at first, protests. The nets had been washed, the shift was over. It was time to go home and forget about work. For any other man the answer would have been no, but this is Jesus. How do you say no to Jesus? You know what happens. When the nets are lowered this time, the catch is overwhelming. Simon and his companions, James and John, are intimidated because they know they had experienced a miracle. They fall on their knees and ask Jesus to leave. Like Wayne and Garth in an old Saturday Night Live episode, they aren't worthy! Jesus leaves but takes the fishermen with him. From now on the catch of the day will be men. Can I state the obvious?

That moment was a turning point in Peter's life. Tradition tells us Peter died 34 years after the crucifixion of Jesus in the city of Rome. Did you know Peter was crucified upside down? Why upside down? It was his request; he wasn't worthy to die as Jesus died. So much happened to him between his calling and his crucifixion. It was Peter who walked on the water. It was Peter who answered the question, who do you say I am? It was Peter who experienced the transfiguration first hand. It was Peter who denied Christ three times. It was Peter who fell asleep in the in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus prayed. It was Peter who cut off the guard's ear when Jesus was arrested. It was Peter who ran to the empty tomb on Easter morning. It was Peter who molded the early church. It was Peter! He did all those things. They can all be traced to one experience, his calling. On that day, he had no clue how much his life was going to change. That day started like every other day. If you are going to follow Jesus, then

you had better be prepared for a great adventure. I know that is true, because it is my story as well.

I am not exactly sure when I felt my calling into the ministry. Looking back, it has always been there. After wrestling with self-doubt for years, I finally surrendered. Every secular job I had or could obtain seemed pointless. I remember signing those papers for my first student loan in seminary. Debt has a way of getting your attention. I wasn't sure about my calling on that day. The only thing I knew for sure on that day was my two major weaknesses. First, I knew I could not read well. For years, I thought I was dumb. Later, I found out I have something called a binary condition. My eyes are not the problem, the problem is the muscles around my eyes. One eye rests above the line I am reading and the other below. I have never read comfortably, it has always been a struggle. I read best in the morning, when I am rested. Second, I hated public speaking. All those years of well-meaning teachers forcing me to read that darn paragraph to the class had taken a toll. I can still hear other students laughing at me and calling me stupid. Most days I thought they were right. Yet, in spite of that, I went back to school to be a minister. Even I thought it was crazy. I didn't have a clue what God could do with with me, but there must be something. I have to admit all these years later, it has been quite a ride. God has taken me almost full circle, Indiana, Kentucky, St. Clairsville, Cleveland and here. Geographically, I am about seventeen miles from where I began. This is the truth. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. The church has consumed my life; my calling has made me complete. I get to be part of something bigger than life itself. Personally and spiritually, I am a different person than I was when the journey began. I hope I'm a better person. I consider my calling one of my most valuable possessions. I am so blessed to know why God created me.

Do you know why you were created? I have worked with people my entire adult life. I have sat with them in various times of crisis and personal joy. I have tried to help them answer those eternal questions. One of those questions is, do you know why you were created? Studies tell us only 6% of people say they know their purpose. It is my experience that most people say they do not know, but they do know. It is more than misplaced arrogance, it is misunderstanding. Consider two things with me. First, your calling may not be your vocation. My calling and my vocation are one. That may not be your story. You may never receive a single paycheck, but you will receive the satisfaction that comes from a blessing. Second, your calling may take you outside of the organizational church. Not everyone is called to be a preacher or a missionary. You may be called to a place where the only thing that matters is human need. We have no shortage of human need. It is found in every corner of our society and the the world.

One of the great historical documents in the church is the Westminster Confession of faith. It was drawn up in 1646 by the Westminster Assembly to be a confession of the Church of England. However, it has also had a great amount of influence on the Presbyterian world. There is nothing lightweight about it. It is long and detailed. It tells us where the church stands on a wide variety of issues. One of those issues is the

creation of mankind. The Westminster Confession of Faith says the purpose of life, itself, is to glorify God. I believe that is true. What are you doing with your life to glorify God? How many things have you done in your life to discredit God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Today, I want to help you discern why God created you. In other words, I want to help you discover your calling. I do not know how old you are, but it is not too late. You are in this world for a reason. Your calling may come to you as a complete surprise. Or, the complete surprise may be you have been living out your divine purpose for a long time. I do not want to make this complicated, so I have distilled my thoughts around three things you must acknowledge. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Acknowledge your Gifts

First, if you want to discover your calling, then you must acknowledge your gifts. Don't be so humble. You are a gifted person. God does not make junk. Look at what comes naturally. Peter was a natural leader. He didn't go to a workshop, it came naturally. I do not have to tell you your gift, because you know it. It is those things that come naturally. What is it about your station in life that makes you uniquely qualified to use your gift? It is amazing how your gifts and your purpose go hand in hand. If you will admit that you are gifted person, say, **"Amen!"**

Acknowledge your Burdens

Second, if you want to discover your calling then you must acknowledge your burdens. God is in the people business. Jesus told Peter he was going to be a "fisher of men". What is it about this world that drives you crazy? What social ill grabs your attention? What part of the population has a hold on your heart and won't let go? Have you ever asked, why doesn't someone do something? Maybe God is calling you to be that someone? If there is something in this world that drives you crazy, say, **"Amen!"**

Acknowledge your Fears

Third and finally, if you want to discover your calling then you must acknowledge your fears. I admire Peter because there was no sign of self-doubt. He just jumped right in. That is not my story. My fears cost me three years in the ministry. I didn't think I could do this for a living. I was wrong, again. If you are going to accept your calling, then you had better acknowledge your fears and confront them. If it is a God thing, then the doors will open. If you think you can remember to confront your fears, say, **"Amen!"**

The Red Bird Missionary Conference is one of the three missionary conferences found within the United Methodist Church. The other two are in Alaska and Oklahoma. Red Bird is located in Beverly, Kentucky and helps the people of Appalachia. For years, this church has sent Campbell soups labels to help them. One year we decided to do more. We decided to go and visit. It was a fun trip, you may have gone. There was a van full of us. I believe we stayed for two nights and three days. We saw the work of that arm of the church. We saw the food distribution center. We saw the clothing distribution

center. We saw the wood shop where things were repaired. We visited a school and a church. The highlight of the visit for me was the people. It is an amazing core of people who work at Red Bird.

One of the women who worked at Red Bird was a woman by the name of Betty. She was a woman well past normal retirement. On the last night we were there, I had a chance to talk to her. We were sitting on a deck enjoying the mountain air. She said to me, "Russ, your people sure seem to like you." I said, "Betty, this van-load of people does like me. The bus load of people who hate me are back in Youngstown." We laughed and I said, "Betty, were you raised in Kentucky?" She said, "No." Then, she told me her story. For most of her life she had lived in Milwaukee. She came to Kentucky in retirement. It was supposed to be just for the summer, but it turned into a lifetime. She sold her home and left everyone behind. Then, she shared something personal. She said, "My kids don't need me. They are adults and have their own families. Each one is successful. They don't need me, these people do. I haven't lived here long, but it is home. I have never been more satisfied." Betty didn't say it, but I knew it was true. She was called to be at Red Bird. It was her purpose.

Do you know why you were created? Peter was fortunate because Jesus called him personally. I am fortunate because I understand my calling now. What about you? What is God calling you to do? It is not that hard. To discover it, just acknowledge three things:

Acknowledge your gifts

Acknowledge your burdens

Acknowledge your fears

John F. Kennedy once said, "*Effort and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"