

Sunday, February 10, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-8

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Free to Follow Jesus

“Born Free as free as the wind blows...” You might remember this song from either the 1966 movie of the same name telling the story of Elsa the lioness who was raised by Joy and George Adamson and was told to release her to a zoo. However, Joy’s desire was that the lion be able to live free and as the lion she was born to be. If you are not familiar with this movie you might recall this same song being used in “Madagascar’s” opening scene where Marty the zebra is having a daydream swinging on a vine, running through the marsh, watching penguins fly and then jumping over a cliff. The daydream stops when Alex the Lion interrupts his morning run on the treadmill where they are both living at the zoo in Manhattan New York. But both of these movies depict what is essentially- not freedom but in reality a place where life is controlled and the hope and vision of life as it was meant was changed.

In this season of Epiphany we continue to focus upon the person of Jesus as we learn more about his purpose and who he was, is and can be to all people. We recall the story of the Wise Men following the star in order to give the child Jesus gifts. We recall Jesus’ baptism and how God called him his beloved Son. We also remember the story of Jesus turning water into wine so that the wedding banquet would continue. The Spirit of God was upon placed upon him in the reading of scripture and it is with this reading in his home synagogue that Jesus causes disruption and he simply walks out and into the ministry to which he had been preparing to do.

What does Jesus do? He drives out evil spirits, he heals people from sickness and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God. The people are crowding around him wherever he goes and they are wanting to hear his message. One day he is beside the Sea of Galilee when the crowds are pressing toward him. He sees two boats and gets into the one belonging to Simon. He sits down and teaches the people who have gathered on the shoreline. After he is done he wants to Simon to go fishing. But Simon protests. Simon calls him, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night but haven’t caught anything. Then thinking again—but if you say so, I will let down the nets.” Simon moves from the collective we as a group of fishermen who have not been successful in getting any fish to him being alone and willing to put out the net again. A few minutes pass and soo the nets are filled with fish so much that the nets are breaking. Simon then tells the other fishermen to help him out with all the fish. There are so many the boats are almost sinking.

Simon Peter looks at all the fish and then falls at Jesus' knees. He proclaims, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Simon Peter realizes who this is—no longer does he call him "Master" but "Lord." No longer does Simon Peter protest the putting out of nets or complaining about fishing all night- but simply states about his own life—I am sinful. Simon's partners, Zebedee's sons James and John are also astonished. Jesus then says to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." James, John, and Simon pull the boats filled with fish up to the shore and follow Jesus.

Wow, what a story of wonder, amazing responses and emotions. Simon is ok with Jesus using his boat as a podium after all, he has been fishing all night, and he's tired. There was no need to go to the market to sell fish as he doesn't have any. So he listens to Jesus speak. He knows about this teacher because he has taught in the area around the Lake and in the synagogue. He calls him "Master" meaning a teacher or tutor not in reference to a servant=master relationship. Jesus then decides to do something for Simon, James and John—and what he does is change their life. Not because of the large catch of fish when the boats were so full, but because they saw and experienced something more in Jesus. They saw all the fish but Simon falls at Jesus' feet and confesses his sinful nature to Jesus. And then calls him, "Lord." Simon's life changed right then and there and Jesus knew it. Simon believed that Jesus was the Lord. And Jesus knew this. All he needed to do was to ask him to follow. Jesus knew he was afraid of what was going to happen next but reassured him when he said not to be afraid.

Simon along with James and John took the boats up on shore and freely chose to follow Jesus. There were no payments required; no application to fill out, no aptitude test. Simon had already seen Jesus for who he really was—the Lord and he chose to follow Jesus. He could have sold all the fish and went back to see Jesus, but did not.. He left everything and made himself free to follow Jesus.

But what does it mean to be free to choose? Supermarkets and stores of ways to get you to buy more than you want== an example is spend \$2225 and get a free bonus gift worth \$25!—it could be a plant, shrimp cocktail, soap, dishes, ham, turkey. Are you getting it for free? Or is it your choice?

What about the BOGO- buy one get one for free—is this free or a way of clearing out items? Is there anything that we can get for free? Living in Canada we have the Canadian Constitution which includes The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982. The Charter "protects every Canadian's right to be treated equally under the law. The Charter guarantees broad equality rights and other fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion." But are we really free to do as we please? We can assemble to worship and gather but to parade

requires permission. Children and youth are required by law to go to school until age 16 but in order to become a good citizen we often encourage more than this. We welcome people at the borders for safety reasons and those seeking refuge. But are we really free to live?

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about what he preached to remind them of the gift of God's grace which is given to all who believe. He wrote of the importance of telling the good news of Jesus who died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day and that he appeared to his disciples and he appeared to Paul. But it is because of God's grace that was working in him that enable him to preached this to the people in Corinth and this is what they believed. God's grace was upon them then- and given to them again and again. Freely given, freely received. Paul is reminding them of this free gift from God—Grace.

Yet what about us? As a church family our purpose is to make disciples in Jesus Christ. We share this message of God's grace by telling the story of Jesus' death and resurrection so that those hearing the message will respond freely. That is, by faith you will freely choose to follow Jesus and become a part of his church family. Yet there is a cost to this discipleship. We are free to follow yet there is a cost to be a disciple of Jesus. This was made clear by Dietrich Bonhoeffer a German theologian writing before World War II. He distinguishes between "cheap" and "costly" grace. According to Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, the cross, and even without Jesus Christ.

Cheap grace, tells the gospel preached as follows: "Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness." The problem is that there is no demand for discipleship. But in contrast to this, the cost of being a disciple of Jesus is that free gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels an individual to submit to Jesus just like Simon—I am a sinful person yet still freely follow Jesus. It is costly Jesus says: "Don't be afraid—from now on you will catch people".

As people hearing this good news today, we are still being called by Christ to become his disciples. This is the work of the Christian church. We are to free to follow but the cost of discipleship is worth the grace that comes to us by God. We are born free to choose but what comes to us as in the words of "Born Free" by Kid Rock—is God's grace on us all.

His song states: "I was born free. I was born free. Born free. And I will vow to the Shining seas and Celebrate God's grace on me. I was born free."

We are born free= free to follow Jesus with the cost of being His disciple. Let us pray.

Holy and wonderful God we praise you and we thank you that you call us to love you, to give of ourselves to you and to learn from you. Help us to follow in faith, to receive your grace and to celebrate your unconditional love for us all. Call to us now as we pray and sing together. Amen.