

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, we are here. We have come throughout the noise and busy-ness of our lives to this place to take a time-out. Our lives scream the need for the silence, for rest, for order, for wisdom and strength that comes from connection with our neighbors and with you. We come here, God, to be mindful of relationship, among those we know personally and those we must be mindful of throughout the world who need our care and compassion. We come to remember what we easily forget, and we come to take these lessons remembered into the world to make them manifest. We come to be happy; we come to grieve. We come to be the “us” you created to be. We take a time out to reflect upon these things and to reflect upon where we are going, individually and together.

Gracious God, we hear your calling to repent, but we recognize that it requires time and intentionality to fully take hold of that calling. However, once we pay heed to that lifestyle of repentance, the world changes around us. We see things that we have a hard time reconciling can come into focus when you are our focus and your calling, in whatever shape and form it takes, becomes something we own. You are consistently calling this world to repent and to see the world through new eyes; may we take hold of this difficult calling so that we may be for the world a bastion of your love and care in the midst of so much waywardness. We pray all these things in the name of the Lord of calling, of true vision, of guidance and of fulfillment, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together...

## SERMON

Think back to the last time you had a fight. It probably isn't pleasant, but when conflict is at its best, we learn something vital from it. No matter how a fight starts, there's an issue where one or both parties feel wronged. The fight may be by a miscommunication;

it could be through some deed done wrong or not done at all. In order to resolve a fight, there has to be some sense of coming together, and that requires one or both parties to see something in a different way. It requires that new eyes be brought to the table in order to find resolution. You might need to step back five steps, or just step out of your entrenched position to see the situation anew. It takes humility. Something else must be done for any relationship to move forward, personal or professional. If that doesn't happen, the fight is just a bad fight. Without resolution, the same cycle happens again and again. There must be repentance, usually on everyone's part, in order for all to become whole again. Each person must see the world anew through the lesson learned, and we grow through it.

Last week, we heard the calling of the first disciples from the Gospel of John, the version that we do not necessarily think of. We usually think of Matthew's version. Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." This passage says much about calling, from its mundane forms to life-altering vocation. It shows how God shapes us and uses our personalities. When we are attuned to God in the many ways God comes into our lives, our plans are disrupted, for we take on something much more incredible. We repent, and the world changes around us. Let's look at this passage recognizing that our plans are funny, as we gain a new sense of repentance, see the result of repentance on the disciples' lives, and hear God's calling in the world through repenting.

Jesus calls out, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." I'm sure you'll see someone at the Super Bowl holding out a sign that says something akin to that; I see it all the time when I go to a sporting event. As we've talked about in the past, that is a phrase from Christian-ese. In these walls, it seems self-apparent. However, if there's one thing I hope to teach everyone about the bible time and again, it is that everything, everything is

worth a second look, for things often slip underneath our senses. We hear these words from Jesus about “repentance” and think it has to do with how we live our lives with the smallest things and to not do those little things anymore. Stop saying those things that can hurt someone. Always remember to come to church weekly. While I do appreciate especially that last thing, I think it goes much deeper, like the other callings of Christ. Recently, I heard a great word study on “repent” here on the podcast Sermon Brainwave. How do we usually define the idea of “repenting?” I’d say we mostly associate “Repent” with the feeling of turning back. That is true, but only partly. That is faithful to the reading from the Old Testament, where the word for “repent” literally means to turn back. Not so here with the Greek in the New Testament. What we see as “repent” has a different meaning; here it means to see with new eyes. In the Texts for Preaching commentary, it calls repentance in this context as recognizing the presence of the Kingdom in a new way, calling us from, “safety and routine to a life of unheard-of newness.” In essence, to “repent” here means to look at the world a different way. We see the world with new eyes and a new understanding in repenting; the Kingdom of Heaven has come. Nothing is the same.

How are we repenting? The question is much harder than we might think. It requires that we look at the world consistently anew. Are we consistently opening our eyes and our senses to how the world is being made anew in front of us, or are we seeking to hold onto the old? Using the words of Jesus, we must open ourselves to the possibilities. What is that relationship in your life that you need to see through new eyes and, consequently, make changes? How are you viewing yourself and how you live in this world? How can you see the church through new eyes and connect with it in a new way? We can live our lives from day-to-day relying upon old vision. We find ourselves planning

on stagnation: things will continue the way they always have. This never happens. On the other hand, we can think of the world as under change that we can always calculate and control. This never happens either. The calling of God is against control, against calculation, against pigeonholing into manageable boxes. We are called to realize that our plans are funny when we are looking at everything the same way all the time, whether it be the day-to-day affairs of our individual lives or the greater systems of a world in need.

We can see repentance at work in this story. So here's the iconic picture: Jesus calls to Simon Peter and Andrew: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." What they do is drop their work and leave him. Then Jesus heads to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and says the same thing. They do the exact same thing, leaving the father behind with all the work around him. We laud them as doing the right thing, but look at everything they left behind. There's the father, Zebedee, still in the boat. If you imagine the scene, you can see the father's reaction: flabbergasted, questioning, perhaps even yelling for his sons to come back. In the New Interpreter's Commentary, the ramifications of such an event are clear. When the sons leave the father and the father's business, there goes the father's retirement, there goes the entire household. In essence, there go Zebedee's plans. He has nothing that he planned for, thanks to the disruptive but life-giving calling of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I think this seems kind of harsh on first glance. Zebedee looks to be left out in the cold with his sons' departure, but what is really left out in the cold, according to the New Interpreter's Commentary, is Rome. Zebedee and his family were probably stocking up on fish for quotas due to the Roman Empire...but they are unable to make these quotas. The calling of God is not just for the guidance and fulfillment of the individual but also for the disestablishment of the greater powers of the world, the

powers that spat in the face of God with how they herd and mock the peoples of the world, especially the powerless. If there is something that Jesus speaks about time and time again, it is the hypocritical powers of the Temple and their connection with the all-controlling and minimizing power of Rome. They leave what they thought was their calling on the way to following Christ; they repent. They are starting to see the Kingdom in an entirely new way. They are seeing their world from new eyes, recognizing that their true calling is to literally walk with the Christ. They heard the calling, saw the world differently, and followed.

Plans are funny, because they assume many things. They assume we can control our conditions; they assume we will do things exactly as they have always been or that we will have control over the things that change. When we submit ourselves to the radical calling of God and truly repent in a scriptural sense, we will open our eyes in a new way. This happened with those Sons of Zebedee; it happened with Simon and Andrew. They were called to “repent” in a new way, and as a result, they began a new path. The calling of God is a subtle but also a life-changing proposition. They realized their old plans would not work with this new calling they received; so many Pastors can say the same thing. I know of doctors, lawyers, carpenters...just about any profession, where they suddenly repented in a new way, heard that calling of God, and followed a new path. I myself had the ambition to become a meteorologist in my younger years. I love weather; it’s always exciting to me, but it wasn’t my main calling. I took on this sense of repentance and looked at the world through new eyes. As I did this, it became clear that my vocation was to take up this calling toward pastoral ministry. But, as we all know, that can change on a dime as well.

One another neat little tidbit from Sermon Brainwave, which I quite agree as well, is that when we take up the calling, that doesn’t mean that life has to come to an abrupt

standstill. When we live the calling of God, we leave some things behind, but we don't leave everything. We imagine that when the disciples took up the calling of Jesus, they left everything behind...forever. Well, that's probably not the case. While they may have made it clear that fishing was not going to be their daily life, it's not as apparent that they left their families behind forever. Calling is a multi-layered thing; it's big and small all at the same time. We have a calling throughout our lives, which can take us many places, but we also have a calling each moment to become the most God-focused and service-filled people we can be. That doesn't necessarily mean we have to move from our homes and become cloistered monks, but it does mean we stay attuned; we stay connected. We don't have to drop everything all at once, but it does mean that we do not make OUR plans the center of who we are and what we do. Calling changes everything, and calling changes too.

God has a calling, and that calling changes all the time. We can follow it, or we can choose not to. Nevertheless, to do either is to come face-to-face with real consequences. The disciples in this story chose to follow the calling, and through that following, they realized that, truly, "Plans are funny." Perhaps you've had a similar experience where you took on repentance in this way and saw something new. Perhaps you saw how a relationship could or should change. Perhaps you saw yourself through new eyes. Perhaps you see why Jesus attacked the powers of Rome and what that means for our lives today. Or, perhaps, you saw that the track your life on was not necessarily what you felt truly and deeply called to do. God's calling is tricky but ever so meaningful; it allows us to become fully what we are meant to be and maybe, in the meantime, to figure out that our plans really are funny. Thanks be to God! Amen and Amen.