

"Peter's Legacy: Invitation"

Mark 1:14-20

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

June 5, 2011

Two men separated by two thousand years. Two men living in two different places who both shared something in common. For both of them, the Bible says, heard God's call, listened to it, and decided to stop living the life they'd been living and live a different life. Two men, whose names were changed to reflect the difference from Abram and Simon, to Abraham and Peter.

And I want to talk to you this morning about Abraham and Peter. But before I do, I want to talk to you about somebody else.

His name is Bill, Bill Alexander. And in 2007, he wrote a book called *The \$64 Tomato*. Catchy title, isn't it? The title came from what Bill figured it finally cost him to raise each individual tomato in his garden one year. But the book's really about more than growing tomatoes. The book's really about growing your life.

And at one point in the book, Bill asks an important question. It grows out of a gardener's life. Listen to how it sprouts up into his mind. Every year he writes, a gardener prepares the soil. You plant the seed. You water the seedling. You weed around the plant. You pick the fruit. It's pretty much the same each year.

But then he pauses and asks, what if? What "if you were doomed to live your life like that; the same life over and over for eternity, would you choose the life you're living now? The question's interesting enough all by itself he says. "But I've always thought the point of asking it is really the follow-up question. And that is, if the answer is no, then why *are* you living the life you're living now?"

And as I read the story from Mark that we read a moment ago I wonder. Was that question somewhere in the back of Simon's mind that morning. Because it was morning, you know when it happened. That's when fishermen cast their nets into the Sea of Galilee. Some of them still do so today. And that's what Simon was doing that morning, Mark says. He was casting a net into the water along with his brother Andrew.

And Jesus, who always seems to be an early riser was walking along the shore. And he saw what Simon and Andrew were doing. But did he see more? Because the Bible says when God looks at our lives; my life, your life, or Simon's life, He doesn't just see what's going on on the outside. He sees what's going on on the inside too. "For man," Scripture says "looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

So I wonder. When Jesus saw Simon that morning, casting his net, what did he see? What did he understand about Simon? Well for one thing he understood Simon was a fisherman. That was obvious. But maybe you noticed. The story tells us that fact twice.

The first time it tells us through description. It describes what Simon was doing when Jesus saw him. He was casting a net. And while I don't know much about fishing with a net, I do know this. It isn't easy to do unless you're a fisherman. You can't just say to yourself one morning. "I think I'll go out catch some fish this morning. And I think I'll use a net!"

No, if you're going to fish with a net, it's going to take time. You're going to have to learn how to make a net that holds together. You're going to have to learn how to hold it so it doesn't tangle. You're going to have to learn how to throw it so it lands all spread out where you want it to be. You're going to have to learn how to do all those things.

So you see fishing with a net isn't for novices. It's only for people who are willing to put in the time to learn how to do it. And in the first century the only people who had the time were fishermen like Simon and Andrew. So when Jesus sees them working, he knows. He knows something about who they are immediately. They're fishermen.

And everyone who read Mark in the first century would know the same thing, immediately. They would read the first part of verse 16, they would read the description of what Simon and Andrew were doing and they would know they were fishermen. And that's why the last few words of the verse are so interesting. Because they repeat what everybody knows; "they were fishermen."

But the Bible almost never just repeats itself. And if you closely at this repetition you'll see that it's telling us something. It's not only identifying Simon and Andrew. It's also telling us that's who they "were." And that's important. Because who we "were" and who we can "become" are often two different things.

You know if there's one thing we can learn about Jesus from reading the Gospels, it's this. When Jesus looks at a life; my life, your life, or Simon's life, he sees it as only God can see it. He sees it not only from the perspective of time. He sees it from the perspective of eternity. He sees the past, the present and the future of our lives. And that means He sees our lives not only for what they have been or even what they are now. It means He sees them for what they can become.

So when Jesus first speaks to Simon, he gives him an invitation. "Come" Jesus says, "Follow me! I'll send you out to fish for people." That's the way the English reads. But the Greek Mark wrote says something slightly different. It says, "Come after me and I'll make you become a fisherman of people."

And although it's poor English I think the Greek's worth knowing because it points you to a great truth. And it's this. Your life can become more than you can make it yourself. Do you believe that? God does. Let me prove it to you.

In the book of Jeremiah, God asks Jeremiah to go down one day to a potter's house. And God asks Jeremiah to watch the potter work. And as the potter works on a lump of clay on his wheel, making it and re-making it into the shape he has in mind for it, God says to Jeremiah, "Can I not do the same thing with Israel that the potter's doing. Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand ... says the Lord."

And we are. We are. For the truth is if we're willing to put our lives into God's hand at any time, in any situation, in any crisis or any condition, God can make us become more than we could ever be by ourselves. Do you believe that? And if you do, let me ask you a question. When was the last time you put your life into God's hand? When was the last time you let Him promise you what Jesus promised Simon? "I will make you become" become someone you could never be by yourself.

I've told you this story before. But this morning I want to tell it to you again. Because it's a story that speaks to my soul every time that I tell it. And what it says to me I hope it will say to you too this morning. For we need to stop trying to live our lives on our own. We need to put our lives back in God's hand. We need to let Him God make us become more than we can be by ourselves.

Her name was Charlotte Elliott. And she was born in England in a town called Clapham in 1789. She was the daughter of a prosperous silk merchant and his wife. And she grew up to be a young woman of great beauty. She was intelligent. She was energetic. She had talent as a writer, an artist and a musician.

But in her early adult life, she contracted a chronic illness that couldn't be diagnosed or effectively treated. It made her weak and nauseous. It stole her strength and her joy. In a letter to a friend, she wrote that, "day after day, and hour after hour," she had "to fight against feelings of overpowering exhaustion," and try not give in "to the depression and irritability that my body causes me to want to indulge in."

Then in 1822 when she was thirty three, a pastor came from Switzerland. He was invited by Charlotte's parents to stay in their home. And one days as he sat talking with Charlotte he said to her, "You must come to Jesus just as you are Charlotte. Not as you might want to be, but just as you are. If you come to Him that way, He will make you become what He wants you to be."

So that's what Charlotte did. She accepted the invitation. She came to Jesus. And she kept coming. Her illness never left her. But Jesus never left her either. And Jesus made Charlotte Elliott become one of the great English poets and hymn writers of the 19th century. And now that you've heard her story again, I'm sure you can understand why she wrote these words. "Just as I am, without one plea. But that Thy blood was shed for me. And that Thou bids me come to Thee. O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

But take a look with me at what you think you know best about this hymn. Take a look at the last line. It's another repetition. And it's not without a purpose. "Come," Jesus said to

Charlotte, "Follow me. I'll make you become more than the invalid you are right now." And He did. "Go," God told Abram, "and I'll make you a great nation." "Come," Jesus said to Simon, "Follow me. And I'll make you become a fisherman of people." And He did.

God has proved over and over again in the legacy of countless lives of men and women from the pages of the Bible and beyond that He can do it. If He's given the chance God can make anyone's life become something more than it's been in the past, more than it is in the present. He can make it become what He alone knows it can be. He can do it.

So let me ask you this. Have you given Him a chance with your life? Have you given Him a chance with your life right now? Have you given Him a chance with the situation you're facing, or the condition you're coping with, or the crisis you're trying to manage? Or have you been trying to take care of it all on your own, with just your wisdom, your strength, your knowledge, your ability?

The great truth that I want you to take home with you today, the great truth that grows directly out of the first story of Simon Peter's life is this my friends. If you come to Him, God can help you become more than you can ever be by yourself. Learn that truth. It's a truth worth learning. Trust that truth. It's a truth worth trusting. Live that truth. And your life will become more than you ever dreamed it could be.

Let's pray ...