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Matthew 4:18-23 Beyond Survival: Self-Esteem
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 4:18-23 New Revised Standard Version

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Can you believe that the first month of 2020 is almost over? We have been talking about what we need to thrive in 2020 beyond survival. We need food, water, shelter, sleep and oxygen to live. To thrive psychologists tell us we also need control, belonging, meaningful existence, and self-esteem.

A few weeks ago I heard the Bishop from Ohio, Bishop Gregory Palmer preach. He shared something that people say to him regularly but that he doesn't like. People will often come up to him and say, “Bishop, when you preach I don't see your color.” He said that is a problem because people aren't seeing him. Bishop Palmer is black. He doesn't want his color to be a barrier to a relationship, but he wants to be seen and known. Color is designed by God. We all want to be seen and known.

So, how do we get self-esteem if we don't have it? How did the disciples in our scripture have the self-esteem that when Jesus called them, they didn't look around and say, “Who? Me?” Just as Jesus called their names, Jesus calls our name. Why is it so hard for us to believe that? Why is it so hard for us to accept that? You might not feel like you are worthy of a gospel of grace. God's love for us is not judgmental. God's love makes room for mistakes. God loves us and always embraces us.

We fill our lives with so much stuff to satisfy us. I brought a little show-and-tell today because I have these things to help me feel important. I have my cell phone so I can know how connected I am to what is going on in the world. I have my wallet with all of my credit cards so that I can feel like I can have whatever I want. My nets are filled to overflowing. My catch is huge, but it is a catch that is not terribly satisfying.

Then I start imagining Jesus, walking along, seeing all of us fishing, all of us hoping for a different kind of catch, and Jesus is saying something. Can you hear him? He's standing on the shore, saying something to us. “Follow me. Follow me, and I will make you fish for people. Follow me, and I will give you work that is satisfying. Follow me, and I will give you a focus that is satisfying. Follow me.”

My self-esteem can be found in being a child of God and a follower of Jesus. I can throw down my nets of worry and my nets of ambition. I can throw down my nets that catch nothing but stress. I can hear Jesus calling from the shore and I can follow.

In the Pray, Read, Grow group I didn't read the book this month. I know! But in the discussion of the book *Holy Envy* by Barbara Brown Taylor we talked about how we can learn about right practice from Judaism. Christians often focus so much on right belief that we forget about right practice. After all, we don't want to be like those Jesus followers that believe absolutely opposite things from what we believe. We know Jesus followers who have very different understandings about how we should read and interpret Scripture.

I remember being in seminary and having a discussion with one of my childhood friends. We had gone to church together since we were in 4th grade. She asked what I was learning and I said, "Well, Adam and Eve weren't real people. That is just a story." She wanted me to withdraw from SMU immediately. I was learning blasphemy and I was turning into a heretic! For her, if Adam and Eve weren't real, then what was the point of any of it? If you believe Adam and Eve were real people, please do not run for the door. It is okay for us to carry around beliefs we have had since childhood. Not everyone needs to go to seminary at SMU. Just know that you don't have to believe that Adam and Eve were real people to follow Jesus. And if you do believe they were real, you can follow Jesus too.

I hope that we find our self-esteem not from a system of beliefs, but from a just and generous way of life, expressed in compassion dedicated to beloved community for all. I hope that our self-esteem comes from following Jesus and loving the way that he does. God calls to us and says, "Follow me." It's sometimes a whisper and sometimes a nudge. But it is a template of love and relationship and compassion. It is fishing for people.

If we are talking about self-esteem that means we are talking about if we are worthy enough for Jesus to call out to us. We think the invitation is for those holy ones, not for us. It's for those better people, not us. But those fishermen Jesus called to from the shore were simple, ordinary people. There was nothing special about them. They weren't at prayer in the synagogue. They weren't searching for God. They were at their nets working, doing life.

Do you know about the elephant seals of Argentina? The mother seal, soon after birthing her baby seal pup, is starving and leaves the baby seal on the shore so that she can go back into the waters to eat. After feeding, she returns to a different part of the beach and begins to call for her baby. Other mother seals do the same, and they all return at a similar time. The mother calls to her pup and listens for the response. Eventually, following each other's voices and scents, the mother and her baby seal reunite, even with all of the others on the beach doing the same thing. From the moment of birth, the sound and scent of the baby seal are imprinted on the mother's memory and the sound and scent of the mother are imprinted on the baby seal's memory. That's how it is with God. We are imprinted with a memory on us, and even if it takes a lifetime, we will find each other.

We hear so many voices and so much calls to us. May we keep straining to hear that one voice who came to show us a way to live focused on compassion for people, focused on a sense of justice for the world and the earth, focused on a sense of healing and reconciling. That's the voice I want to follow. That's the way of living that will fill my nets to overflowing. Sometimes I have to strain to hear that voice, but I keep trying, and Jesus keeps calling. May we be secure in the knowledge that we are the beloved children of God. Our self esteem can be found in being a follower of Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.