

**Sunday, January 22, 2012**

**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

### **Sermon – What About Zebedee?"**

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It is easy to read today's passage from Mark as a call and response story.

However, to do so, ignores the first and last line of the reading.

The opening line says, "Now after John was arrested..." and the closing line says "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men..."

Emotions must have been high on this particular day in Galilee.

The man who had captured their attention, John the Baptist, had been arrested.

Arrest, in those days, had a strong likelihood of turning into a death sentence.

Of course, we know that is what happened to John the Baptist and so we can surmise that Jesus may have been worried for his cousin.

Nevertheless, he carries on and calls to James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

These young men embark on the adventure of a lifetime –walking away from their fishing boats to follow the Lord.

But what about Zebedee?

How do you think he feels?

I'm sure that he depended on his sons to help him with his business.

But, according to scripture, they simply walk away to follow Jesus.

So often, we focus our scripture reading and interpretation on the good things that happen to people when they choose to follow Christ.

We forget that Christ himself, as well as many around him, suffered greatly by losing people who were dear to them. Zebedee lost his sons that day, and only a few years later, both Jesus and James will meet violent deaths.

So how does one deal with these tragedies?

Where is the good news in this story?

The good news comes in Jesus' message that the "Kingdom of God has come near."

Even in our darkest moments there is the promise of someplace else, of something more.

Jesus presents a dream – God's dream of God's Reign, of a world that is ordered completely differently from human systems of power and wealth.

But, more than just present the dream, Jesus invites disciples to live the dream – to become a part of it, to bring it to reality.

When Jesus invites the brothers to "follow" it is not about walking behind him, but is a call to embrace the life, the values, the principles and purposes of Jesus.

The call of Jesus is a call to change.

When we choose to follow we are signaling a willingness to change in significant ways.

It is impossible to be a disciple of Jesus and refuse to change.

Madeline L'Engle cautions, "If we limit ourselves to the possible and provable we render ourselves incapable of change and growth, and that is something that should never end. If we limit ourselves to the age that we are, and forget all the ages that we have been, we diminish our truth."

We all know the truth of this reality in our own lives.

When we resist change, refusing to accept it, clinging, white-knuckled, to the status quo, we inevitably find ourselves broken, hurt and defeated.

But, when we do the hard work of embracing and co-operating with change processes, we usually discover a new life and wholeness, even when the change process itself has been painful.

Our mortal lives are ever changing.

Nothing remains the same.

Our children grow up and move on;

people dear to us die or move away;

cultural norms evolve;

society's values alter.

While our earthly lives proceed at breakneck speed – our heavenly life – life in the Kingdom of God – is eternal, everlasting. From this, we draw hope. For followers of Jesus - nurturing hope is an essential part of our life.

John VanDlear contends that "liturgy is, perhaps, the most effective tool to keep the seeds of hope alive in our hearts. Through our prayers, readings, hymns, symbols and rituals, we are reminded, again and again, of the saving purpose of God, and the future hope we have in Christ. As this vision takes hold of our hearts, we cannot help but remember that, no matter what we may face in the world, there is always another reality - God's Reign - that is at work."

He concludes, "There is no excuse for a pessimistic or cynical Christ-follower. Rather, because of our hope in Christ and our weekly liturgical enactment of it, we are those who keep hope alive for the sake of the world."

When we are faced with changes or challenges that seem daunting we turn to our faith.

Our religious practices exist to steady us when our world is shaken.

We cling to the promise, to the hope that Jesus preaches.

In an essay called the *Biblical View of Reality*, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "For religion is more than a creed or an ideology and cannot be understood when detached from actual living.

It comes to light in moments in which one's soul is shaken with unmitigated concern about the meaning of all meaning, about one's ultimate commitment, which is integrated with one's very existence; in moments in which all foregone conclusions, all life-stifling trivialities are

suspended, in which the soul is starved for an inkling of eternal reality; in moments of discerning the indestructibly sudden within the perishably constant.”

What drama!

What a gift!

My friends, Jesus calls us to follow.

That might mean giving something up.

We might not think of Zebedee as one of Jesus followers because he stayed in the boat.

But indeed, he faced soul shaking changes.

There is no doubt that his life was irrevocably changed the day his sons walked away.

Later in Mark’s gospel, and also in Matthew’s we learn that Salome, the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee is at the foot of the cross when Jesus is crucified.

She is one of the women, along with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus who is there at the end.

Did Zebedee lose everyone to Jesus, or did he become a follower as well.

We don’t know. We do know that he had to adapt.

He had to face a situation that seemed beyond his control and fashion a new life.

The good news in this story is that new life is what we are promised.

Our Old Testament reading today we heard the poetry of Job:

“But where shall wisdom be found?

And where is the place of understanding?

Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living.

‘God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens.’”

God is so much greater than we are.

Rather than approach life with fear and anxiety about those things we cannot control –

Accept God’s gift of life and step back and watch as life unfolds with wonder and awe.

Let your time in worship be a rich interaction with the one who created you.

Know that by accepting Christ’s invitation to follow, you are embarking on a journey that will transform your life and your world.

Embrace the mystery of all you do not know and trust that God understands.