

Haydenville Congregational Church

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Matthew 4:12-23

“Jesus Had Chutzpah”

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

This morning I have my resume with me.

Let's just look at this.

After the heading with my name, title, and work and home addresses, it lists my professional experience; then goes on to my education, the degrees I have earned; then my community service, the boards I have served on; then my publications and significant speaking engagements. So why do we have resumes?

During my lifetime, when I have applied for various positions, I have submitted this document, sent it on ahead to my (hopefully) future employer as a way of introducing myself. Resumes are a way of saying: this is who I am. If this fits with who you are looking for, choose me.

Six years ago I sent a specialized resume called a “Ministerial Profile” to this Church when they were searching for a new Pastor. See what I have done, my Profile said to the Deacons and Trustees of this church. This is where I have studied, this is what I have accomplished, this shows I am worthy, choose me as your next pastor.

Resumes are a summary of our educational and professional lives—a sketch of what we have done of significance. They are meant to impress and to convince, to stand out, to make an impact. Resumes are meant to convey: I am accomplished, I am special, I am the one for you.

Let's keep resumes in the back of our minds as we turn to the Scripture reading for today.

The passage from the Book of Matthew says that after Jesus heard that John the Baptist was arrested, “he withdrew to Galilee.” Jesus left Nazareth and went to Capernaum and made his home by the sea.

Then, the Gospel reading tells us, while walking by the Sea of Galilee, “Jesus saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.” Upon seeing Peter and Simon, Jesus does something outrageous and unforgettable. He says just ten words to the fishermen—ten words that change their lives, his life, and the world forever: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Now remember...at this point in his life, Jesus has no track record, no accomplishments, and no achievements. He has not performed any miracles or healings, and he has not yet begun to preach or teach. At this point in his life, Jesus’ resume is one big blank page. As they say in poker, he’s got nothing.

He had what appeared to be a miraculous birth, but since then he has been out of sight, growing up, maybe learning his father’s trade, probably helping with the family. Jesus is thirty years old when he takes that walk by the Sea of Galilee and calls Peter and Andrew. At that point in his life, he had had a remarkable birth, spoken as a boy once in the synagogue, and at age thirty, gone with throngs of others to be baptized in the Jordan by his cousin John.

When Jesus calls Peter and Simon and tells them to lay down their nets and follow him, he had no documented achievements. And yet he walks by the Sea of Galilee and tells two fishermen: drop your nets, leave your work, abandon your homes, and come with me. Jesus did not have an impressive resume but he had that fine Jewish characteristic passed down from his foremothers and his forefathers: he had chutzpah. Jesus had confidence, charisma, and the courage of his convictions. And beyond those good qualities, Jesus had the light of God in his eyes. He must have believed that the men he was calling to follow him would see in his countenance what could not be summarized in a list of accomplishments: the radiance of God shining out from his face. “Follow me” he said, “and I will make you fish for people.” Jesus was filled with the Spirit and that was evident to the men he called as his followers.

Notice that Jesus asks Peter and Andrew to leave everything and follow him without explaining what fishing for people means, where they will go, or what he intends to do with them. Jesus does not perform a miracle before their eyes, does not walk on water to reach them, nor does he say who he is and why he needs them. Jesus says only, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Simple, direct, clear. Profound and world-altering.

And the fishermen, Peter and Andrew, respond with whole-hearted acceptance. The Bible says, “Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” They put down their work, their livelihood, and they follow Jesus.

And then the Gospel tells us this exchange happened again.

“As Jesus 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.”

This story is stunning on many levels.

One is the fact that Jesus calls his disciples with such a simple invitation before he has done anything to impress them or make them want to follow him. Jesus knows that the ministry he is beginning will be done in community and that he must surround himself with beloved companions who he will lead, teach and empower to heal and carry on in his name. Jesus has a vision and he invites others to join him without flashing any credentials, convincing anyone of his power, or spelling out his plans. Jesus’ invitation is strong, convicted, and open-hearted.

“Follow me.” It is stunning in its simplicity.

And what is also stunning is that the men follow him.

According to the Bible, those who Jesus calls do not hesitate, they do not grill him, interview him, ask about his qualifications, or explore whether what he has in mind fits with their plans for the future. Those who Jesus calls do not question Jesus and they do not pause. They respond, immediately, to the call.

Jesus offers just ten words, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people,” and the men say YES, we’ll come. Not maybe, not a tentative yes, not a this-could-be-risky, but okay. They “immediately” leave their nets and go with Jesus.

Jesus’ invitation is stunning in its simplicity.

Their response is stunning in their willingness.

Our reading for today serves to remind us that Jesus was not compelling because of what he did. Jesus was compelling because of who he was. Jesus was a love-filled, light-filled, Spirit-filled being, and people responded to those qualities radiating out from within him.

A lesson embedded in this story for us is the reminder that we are human beings not human doings. We are more than our resumes, we are children of God. Jesus did not approach people with a resume in hand. He came with an outstretched hand—a glorious being with an open hand and a life-changing invitation.

Jesus was irresistible. He had chutzpah and was magnetic and captivating because he was filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God. And so the response of Peter and Simon, James and John to Jesus' invitation should not surprise us. They saw who he was and did not need to know what he had done. They sensed his essence and did not need to review his resume. They could feel the enormity of his heart, the goodness of his actions, the depth of his compassion, and the righteousness of his intentions. They sensed the pureness within him, and the holiness that surrounded him.

Peter, Simon, James and John were compelled to follow Jesus—it is as if they had been waiting all their lives to hear **this** voice, to be issued **this** call. When it came, they dropped their nets and followed him. It is like they were waiting, ready, anticipating, prepared—and they knew at once that it was time.

Augustine opens the first book of his *Confessions* with the statement that “our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” It would seem that Peter, Simon, James and John, already in a worthy vocation, had restless hearts—so restless that when they heard Jesus' call to them, they could do nothing else but follow him. Maybe they were simply responding to what had already been imprinted on their souls from birth—the knowledge of the voice of God—so that when they heard that voice again, all they could do was follow.

I believe that we also have restless hearts. I believe we are born with the knowledge of the voice of God inside us and we long to hear that voice again.

As Christians alive today, we know Jesus' resume. We know what he did. We are aware that the closing line of today's reading is true: “Jesus went throughout the Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among them.” We know Jesus' story, his gifts, table fellowship, miracles, teaching and preaching. We can quote his accomplishments.

But like the early disciples, we long to follow Jesus not because of all that he did but because of all that he was and all that he continues to be. Like the disciples, we are restless...we long for Jesus' presence. We want him near us, we want him to call us, we want to feel his love for us. We are restless until we follow him and rest in him. Like the early disciples, we have searched, waited, and prepared. We are eager to hear Jesus' voice, eager to find him, eager to be summoned, eager to stop the churching in our hearts. Augustine was right...we are restless until we rest in him.

The great blessing in our lives is that when we grow quiet, sit in prayer or walk in nature, when we still our racing minds, Jesus appears before us, speaks directly to us, invites us to follow him. And the great blessing and the great relief is that like the early disciples, we too can say yes without hesitating. We can follow him and we can rest in him.

Like the early disciples, we can place Jesus at the center of our lives and be changed for life. Jesus can quiet our restlessness, end our searching, subdue our agitation, and fulfill our longing.

Jesus is bold enough to call us still today as his followers, his disciples, his people. And when we experience that call and feel his presence, we are bold enough to respond. That living, pulsating and compelling Spirit, out there in the universe, burrows into our hearts, whispers in our ears, taps us on the shoulder and calls us with the simple words, “Follow me.” And it is with thanksgiving that we say yes. YES, I will place YOU at the center of my being—my work, words, and witness will revolve around your presence in my life.

Like the early disciples we come into this world imprinted with God’s kiss and blessing and we long to be reunited with the divine. In our souls and in our hearts, in the very core of our very being, we are seekers—scanning the horizon for the answer, looking around for the way, trying to quiet the agitation, hoping to still the unrest, struggling to fill the emptiness.

We long to be reunited with God.
We long to hear, “Follow me” so that we too can immediately say YES and we can lay down our burdens, embrace and follow God.

And so I invite you to soften your hearts, calm your minds, quiet your breathing, release your anxieties, and silence your thoughts. I invite you to bask in the sure knowledge that God is near, radiant, all-loving, AND beckoning to you.

A voice you have known since your birth is calling to you again saying, “Follow me.” You have been restless. You have been waiting. You are prepared. And you can respond—with ease and gratitude, with confidence, and with joy.
Amen.

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

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