

Leaving Baggage Behind

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Well – so far today we have talked about the Coronavirus or Covid-19, we have mentioned the things that are cancelled in the program life of the church, so let's keep going with another topic we don't like discussing – sin.

I know – when you tuned in this morning – you were thinking, "**Gosh, I hope the sermon is all about sin today.**" But we really can't journey through Lent without discussing sin at some point. And why not today.

Every one of us has sin in our lives and we carry it around like extra baggage that slows us down. And leaving that baggage behind is the purpose of Lent. Leaving behind the sins or shortcomings that separate us from God.

But this is also one of the reasons Lent is a difficult season for most believers because we like to think – other people sin – I just make mistakes.

21st century believers have become experts at rationalizing our behavior, denying our intentions, forgetting the wrongs we've committed, but always remembering the wrongs that have been done to us. Sound familiar?

And maybe that is the heart of the problem: we've denied so long and lied to ourselves so often – we don't know our own souls and that is why we desperately need this season of Lent to finally face our sins and who we are.

Someone once said that sin is not simply breaking religious rules that we would all be better off without. It is NOT just doing the wrong thing; it is becoming the wrong person.

The opposite of sin is not goodness;

the opposite of sin is faith, to be grounded in God – centered on God.

God is NOT a fan of sin; that should come as no surprise to you.

But God does not disapprove of sin because he doesn't want us to enjoy life.

God created us and God created us for joy.

God disapproves of sin because it promises so much and delivers so little.

It is quite remarkable how we have used euphemisms to protect our tender sensibilities - our precious feelings.

The success we chase almost works, until it doesn't.

The money that we sacrifice family and friends to attain almost works, until it doesn't.

All of the stuff that we feel we are entitled to almost works, until it doesn't.

We possess the talent to make idol out of almost anything – and then lose ourselves in our idol worship.

Everyone needs to be honest and acknowledge our sin and find our way back to God. Because we can turn something good into an obsession – we can turn something that should help us into something that hurts us. We don't intend to – but we sin. So we need to find out way back to God.

Our passage today is from Luke's Gospel.

Jesus is teaching the people about God, and faith, and hope, and the human condition.

He loves people and he is teaching them about a better way to live.

The crowd is so captivated by this vision of a new and better life that they begin to crowd Jesus, literally almost pushing him across the shore and into the water. So Jesus being the smart guy he always is, sees two boats and asks Simon Peter if he can use his boat. So Simon Peter rows the boat off shore a bit, Jesus sits down and continues to teach.

Right here is where our story gets very interesting. Peter is hearing Jesus teach; we don't know what the exact content was on that day so long ago.

Jesus could have mentioned turning the other cheek and the Peter thinks about his anger issues. Remember, he would end up cutting that ear off a man in the Garden.

Or maybe Jesus is saying, "don't worry about your life" and Peter thinks of all the fears that hold him back.

Maybe, just maybe, Peter, as he listens to Jesus, has this odd combination of hope about what he could be and shame or guilt about how far he has fallen short.

All human beings have a standard of behavior that we aspire to.

Jesus of course came to this planet to describe the divine standard.

And we can react to it in countless ways; we may be inspired, intimidated, angered, depressed or even offended by Jesus' standard for living, but no matter your reaction, we all know that on our own we do not measure up.

And that is the first step of our journey toward God in this process we call leaving your baggage behind – this journey of lent.

We have to know there is another way to live; we have to know there is a better way to live.

Without acknowledging a divine higher standard, we will always be stuck right where we are.

So – what do we do – lets go back to the story.

Jesus finishes his teaching and then asks Simon to go out into the deep water and drop his nets.

But there are a couple of problems: Jesus is a rabbi – Simon Peter catches fish for a living. It's Peter's boat after all. And it's the wrong time of the day to fish. You fish on the Sea of Galilee at night – you do now – and you did then.

The fish will not bite in daylight and Simon Peter is exhausted from fishing all night and catching nothing.

But Simon Peter does what we must all do on our journey to God; we make that leap of faith and do what Jesus tells us. Of course, you know the results; the nets were so full of fish they had to bring in a second boat.

Peter's reaction is so startling. He could have chalked up Jesus' advice as beginner's luck or if he was smart he would ask Jesus to become his partner in the fishing business. But, Instead, he does something so holy and so extraordinary that we are still telling his story 2,000 years later.

Simon Peter, this simple man from a simple fishing village on the Sea of Galilee instinctually knows far more than we do despite our education, our social status and the size of our bank accounts.

Simon Peter falls at Jesus' knees into a mess of smelly fish, and asks Jesus to leave for he is a sinful man. Peter shows us up close and personal what confession looks like.

I know – in today's world – in today's church – we aren't big on confession. We don't like admitting stuff – especially stuff about ourselves.

But – for lent to have the power to change us – then we need to be honest and confess to God that we have blown it.

When I was young – my very first interaction with confessing came through an unlikely source – an Elvis Presley gospel song. My Mother would put the Elvis gospel album on as we were getting ready for church. And one day I was sitting by the record player in the living room – that big console model – but we were fancy – ours was a record player AND an 8-track player. Well Elvis had sung about Crying in the Chapel – and How Great thou art. And then I heard or paid attention to the song "Run On". In the lyrics it said that we could run on for a long time – but God know what we are doing. He said,

You may throw your rock, hide your hand
Working in the dark against your fellow man
As sure as God made day and night
What you do in the dark will be brought to the light
You may run and hide, slip and slide
Try to take the mote from your neighbor's eyes
Oh yeah, as sure as God made the rich and poor
You're gonna reap just what you sow, oh, oh no
You can run on for a long time

I don't know why – but that made me stop and look at my own life. I mean – I was a near perfect kid – but that made me stop and think and realize that I could do better.

Our confession can be as simple or as complex as we need it to be. What matters is we understand in the deepest part of our hearts and souls that the sin we have allowed in – is making us what we don't want to be. That just like we know as disciples of Jesus – our goal is to be more and more like Jesus every day – to live closer and closer to that divine standard. Well the sin that we have justified and excused in our life – is NEVER going to help us live like Jesus calls us to live. In fact – as long as we are carrying that baggage – we will never get where Jesus calls us to go.

Now – I love how the story ends - Peter asked Jesus to leave him because he knows he's a sinner, but Jesus always sees past our words and into our hearts.

Jesus doesn't deny our sins, but rather give us a new intention,
a new way to be the kind of person who can spread the Kingdom of God.

When we gain forgiveness of our sin, the new intention is simple: we learn to listen to Jesus, and we follow him, and life is never the same again.

Does that mean that we never sin – no – unfortunately we will – but we know that when we do – we can be forgiven – and we can keep following Jesus.

Scripture tells us that God is light and light always reveals what is hidden. On this third Sunday of Lent God's light shows our baggage of sin and gives us opportunity to confess and be forgiven.

So here is our Lenten question for today. What baggage, what sins are standing between you and God and will you confess and repent of those sins so that you might be free. So that you can be the person that God knows you can be – that Jesus calls you to be.

Only you can answer this question and I pray that each one of us will leave our baggage behind today. Amen.