

**BEAUTIFUL TRUTH**  
***Sermon for Epiphany 3B—Mk 1:14-20***  
LPC, 1/25/15

We spoke last week about vocation: the call of God on our lives. We had on that occasion the model of Jesus' call to Philip and Nathanael. Today we have another story about Jesus calling disciples to follow him. This account is from another Gospel, the Gospel of Mark (last week was John,) and it's about other disciples, two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, and James and John.

The accounts could not be more different. Nathanael was skeptical and sneering at first, but Simon, Andrew, James and John, we are told, "immediately" left everything to follow Jesus. They left the tools of their livelihood: their nets and boats. And James and John left their father Zebedee.

While we can admire the faith of these four men in immediately leaving everything they knew to follow Jesus, it seems a bit unfair to poor Zebedee. I remember how tough it was for a family I knew once when not one but all three of their children left home to join Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

But I heard Bishop Atkinson preach on this passage once and his words shed new light on the subject for me. The good bishop said that Zebedee had a ministry too. His sons were called to follow Jesus on the road, but Zebedee was called to keep the home fires burning, so to speak. This possibility makes assuages my feelings sufficiently that I can turn my attention back to James and John, which is what the author Mark intends.

How were James and John able to risk so much for a life with Jesus, which must surely have been a great unknown for them? How were they so sure they were doing the right thing? They were risking not only their own futures but their father's as well. It's obvious that Jesus had a powerful effect on people, but one can't help wondering how the disciples could leave everything they knew and immediately throw in their lot with this admittedly charismatic but unknown itinerant preacher. How could they do this thing?

This is similar to a question that came up last Tuesday evening at a meeting of the Lawrencefield Readers. We were discussing the book *Life in a Jar*, which is about a woman named Irena Sendler, whose memory was revived by a small group of Kansas teenagers doing a history project. Irena Sendler lived in Warsaw during World War II. During the Nazi occupation, until the Jewish ghetto was razed following the uprising of 1943, Irena smuggled 2500 Jewish children to safety. To give an idea of the magnitude of this effort, this is 2-1/2 times the number of people saved from the Nazi death camps by the much better known Oskar Schindler.

During this time Irena was in constant danger. If she were discovered she knew she would be shot. She knew her actions put her frail elderly mother at risk as well. How was she able to risk so much to do what she believed was right?

Irena survived the war, and to her death in 2008 she contended she had done nothing very heroic, she had just done what she knew in her heart she had to do. The Lawrencefield Readers discussed at length what might have so motivated her. Her late father, an unselfish and compassionate man, had taught her “If you see someone drowning, you must try to rescue them.” There was clearly a lot of the father in the daughter.

Not for the first time I thought that behind a lot of women who have done great things is a father who truly believed in his daughter. This is probably true for parents and children of both genders. People who are able to do great things, risking much in order to do what is right, probably have had at least one parent who really and truly believes in them.

Let’s apply this theory to the life of discipleship. Those of us who would follow Jesus have just such a parent: a heavenly father who really and truly believes in us. Trusting in the love and support of God, just as those who are fortunate trust the love and support of their earthly parents, we can do amazing things... things that might not even be imaginable, like the sacrifices of James and John, or Irena Sendler.

Unfortunately, many of us suffer from a reduced self-image. We self-limit because we don’t believe ourselves worthy of God’s love and support. This is, quite simply, bunk. Even if we were to be unworthy of God’s love and support by virtue of being God’s creatures, we are made worthy of God’s love and support by virtue of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Shall we dare to see ourselves as God sees us? As beloved children who have God’s love and support? As children of a Father who believes in us? As beautiful?

While pondering this, I came across a brief poem by Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine sister. The poem is simply this:

I will believe the truth about myself,  
no matter how beautiful it is!

Can we believe the beautiful truth about ourselves, that God loves us and believes in our capacity to do good? If we dare to believe this, we will be able to dare much.

My theory is that people like James and John and Irena Sendler are able to perform incredible acts of goodness at great risk and sacrifice because they believe the beautiful truth about themselves, that they are loved and believed in. For Christians, our beautiful truth is that we are loved and believed in by none other than God Godself. If we believe this beautiful truth about ourselves, we too can do feats both great and small, each according to our own calling, just like James, John and Irena.

See if you can take this to heart:

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