

Wild and Precious Life

Epiphany 3, Matthew 4:12-23

When I was in college, my campus Pastor Dan Erlander read a poem during one of his sermons by Mary Oliver. At that time, I didn't know who Mary Oliver was, but today she is by far my favorite poet. If you've read any of her poems, you could probably figure out why, as I am a person who loves the outdoors. I love nature, mountains, animals, oceans, rivers and just about anything nature related. Mary Oliver truly did as well. And, it was clear that she was called by God to be this person, poet and nature lover.

Here is the poem that pastor Erlander read that stayed with me forever: **The Summer Day by Mary Oliver-**

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper? This grasshopper, I mean - the one who has flung herself out of the grass, The one who is eating sugar out of my hand, who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down- Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away. I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down in the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

So, what is it that you are planning to do with this your one wild and precious life? Said another way, how is God calling you to be in the world? As we reflect on the gospel reading from the book of Matthew this morning, I'd like for you to take some time, not only during this Sermon time, but also later throughout the day and this week to consider how it is that God is truly working in your life and what you are to do with that life. Consider this a little bit of a worship note as the Confirmation students do each week when they come to worship.

And, you will find in the opportunities today a sheet of paper with this very question at the top. Feel free to get out of pencil and get out that question on

that sheet of paper now and as I talk a little bit about Matthew's gospel today, I want you to feel comfortable and free to be able to write down some notes to yourself. That you can pray on as you consider this question for your life today.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus essentially is asking the same thing to his newly found disciples: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Jesus is giving a couple of fishermen a purpose for their lives, and when they do drop their nets and follow Jesus, it will reflect upon them what their lives will be lived for. They are given a peek into their wild and precious lives,

Now, sometimes I wonder, why fishermen? Why did Jesus first call fishermen? Did a fisherman have the ultimate vocation that would work for being a follower of the Way of Jesus? Or, was it simply that Jesus saw some fishermen and understood that they were called to do particular ministry?

Certainly, not all of Jesus' disciples were fishermen! Matthew, who is given credit for writing down this very gospel, was a tax collector. Yet, the

metaphor, "come with me and I will make you tax for people" doesn't work. So, we ought to be glad that Jesus called fishermen first. Still, I certainly hope that Jesus isn't saying that we all ought to be like fishermen, because I don't fish, and many of you certainly do not as well.

The more I think about this Gospel reading, where fishermen suddenly drop everything, including their father, and follow Jesus, the more I think that this is a metaphor for discipleship wherever you happen to be in life. In other words, the principles behind this are not, "Help wanted - Fishermen only" but that Jesus calls us whoever we are and wherever we happen to be and in many and various ways.

This gets down to the whole idea of Lutheran vocation. In fact, the word vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, which means to call or to name. We are all we are all called and named by God through holy baptism. We are not all called to drop everything and go to seminary, for I think that people can sometimes mistake God's calling of vocation with ordination or other church lay professionals as to what Jesus is doing here in this call story. That's not the case. We are all called to

live the good news life with intention, and God encourages us, begs us, and beckons us to make use of what we do in our lives as examples of discipleship.

The carpenter's invitation from Jesus would sound like, "Follow me and I will make you build people." The accountant may sound like, "Follow me and you will help people know they count." A waitress may hear, "Follow me and I will make you serve the spiritual hunger of others." The physician may hear, "Follow me and I will make you heal people." A tired Mom may hear, "Follow me and I will make you raise up children."

What you do *is* how you follow Christ. Your vocation, your job, your task, your way of life, however you like to think of it, is what God calls you to do. And, if you are unhappy in that vocation, that way, that calling right now you are probably on a journey towards something else that God is calling you to do.

Either way, God is calling you in what you do every day, not just Sunday, but Monday through Saturday, to use that vocation to follow Jesus, spread the love of Jesus, and to serve God.

You were meant to be a part of God's plan to bring light and salvation to others, through your baptism. And, you can do this wherever you are, whether you drop everything and go to seminary, or if you grew up in Eau Claire and drive a backhoe, or if God is calling you to retirement. Your vocation is how God calls you to be a follower in daily life...to "fish" for people so to speak.

In fact, Christ needs you where you are to do what you do. Fishermen will reach fishermen. Teachers will reach teachers and students. Truck drivers will reach truck drivers. People who live in nursing homes will reach others who live in nursing homes. Moms and Dads will reach their children.

The only question that is left is, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" God is calling you. Will you listen? Will you heed the call? You have only one life, a wild and precious life that God has given you.

The other day, I was at the grocery store and there was a Mom with her three year old son. Her son was sitting in the shopping cart, enjoying those orange fish crackers. He had

already opened those crackers and just had to start eating them.

It was funny when they got up to the counter. Each thing in the cart went on to the counter until the very last one, which were the fish crackers. And, this little boy was very adamant that he was not going to give up his fish crackers, no way! They were his and no one was getting his fish. After some coaxing, the Mother handed them the package of fish, they were added to the cost, and he got his fish back.

Following Jesus is not unlike that. We have been given this life through the love of God. Yet, often times, we can get the idea that like the fish crackers; it's ours to do with what we like. The attitude is that my life is mine.

Yet, the reality of it is that this one life, which is precious to us and precious to God, does have a purpose beyond us. We are born to glorify a beautiful, compassionate God, and God has a purpose for each and every one of us in doing that. Therefore, it's worth considering during this time what it is that you are doing with this precious life God has given you. Take some time throughout the worship service or whenever to write down some

very special ways that God has made you to be in the world. Maybe it's going well or maybe it needs to change; perhaps you are in between where God is leading you.

On one hand, that's a heavy duty. It can feel like something that isn't our choice to make. Yet, on the other hand, it shows that God has desires for us and loves us, and that each one of us has purpose in this one and only life we have. We, each of us, have unique purpose.

Jesus said, "Follow me, and...fill in the blank." So, what are you going to do with your one wild and precious life that God has given you?

Let us pray: O Lord, there is none like you, pouring out the treasure of divine vocation that we often can't comprehend. Our hearts are empty and you fill them, our joys may be few and you multiply them. O, teach us to become like Christ spreading light and life and love everywhere our steps lead us to go. Enable us to touch others' lives through the gifts that we bring today, through the same Lord, Jesus Christ, Amen.