

GETTING REAL

--What was read moments ago is one of those Gospel stories that has parallel versions. You can find the same story in more than one of the gospel narratives, usually with a number of conspicuous changes to suit the purposes of the later evangelist.

That is the case here, where in Luke, the original three verses from Mark have become eleven--a great example of how a simple memory, with the passage of time, is amplified in the retelling. Added to Luke's rendition is the insertion of the details concerning the miraculous catch of fish, which conclude with the telltale words from Jesus to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Lk 5.10).

Despite how clever these words are--telling a fisherman, mind you, that henceforth he'll be catching people--in them, we come to the heart of the matter. We arrive at the reason for the telling of this story at all: More broadly considered, Jesus calls people from their existing ways of life to new ways of life; Jesus calls people from what they think they are to what they genuinely are.

Here, fishermen become followers of a traveling teacher and healer. Talk about a career change! Men who think they fish for a living discover that that isn't really living, and that something greater beckons to them for a positive response. In essence, Jesus invites Simon, and whoever else is there with him, to get real. It's time to stop pretending about who they are. It's time to cease busying themselves with what's not really pertinent or purposeful, time to submit and commit to a more authentic direction for their lives.

The two parallel accounts, distinct from one another in so many ways, in the end are in complete agreement that the fishermen "left everything and followed him" (5.11). Jesus, it would seem, presents quite a compelling offer.

--And that would be that for this old tale, were it not for the triggering of a certain instinct within us regarding what comes next. If you've been attending not merely to the surface story about those disciples, but also to the deeper implications here for us personally, then you know where we go next with this--from Simon in his boat to you and me in ours. We are, it seems, very much in the same boat.

You see, what is true for Simon and the rest of them is also pointedly, poignantly true for us: We are not what we presently do; there is something new on our horizons. We are not who we ordinarily think we are; we are actually much, much more. It is one of those sad facts of life that, all too often and for far too long, we tend to settle for poorer and paler, less-astonishing and less-satisfying lives than is ever necessary. What's up with that?!

--To a greater or lesser degree, it seems, we are all works of fiction. Somewhere in our early lives, we are given, or along the way we adopt, some storyline concerning ourselves. And for the rest of our days, we spend our precious time, energies, and talents under a sort of spell--doing our best to identify with that storyline, making choices and exercising behaviors that are consistent with it, and ignoring or resisting any experience which contradicts it.

The "up" side to this process is that it affords us (and others, too, for that matter) a sense of consistently knowing just who "we" are. That self-identity helps us to grasp what the plot of our lives should be, what sorts of direction we might anticipate going in life, and what we can expect from ourselves and what others should

expect--and not expect--from us.

We spend the better part of the first half of our lives learning and refining and rehearsing this fiction about ourselves, doing our very best to remain carefully within its parameters, doing all in our considerable capacity to live up to--or, too often, down to!--its standards and goals. And all the while, who we really are goes unrecognized and unrealized, and what we are really capable of goes undeveloped and unexpressed. That would be the "down" side to this process.

In the present tale, we can easily imagine this fictional narrative quickly coming forward in terms of the first thing that Simon says in response to Jesus' invitation to follow him. Can't you just hear him saying, "But I'm just a fisherman!"?

But? Just?

--I'll bet we "but" and "just" our ways through much of our lives, too. However, when it comes to the imperative of getting real, there are no "but's" or "just's" about it.

It is hardly surprising, I suppose, that Jesus prefaces his words to Simon concerning his possible future of "catching people" (5.10)--or, as Mark puts it, "fish[ing] for people" (Mk 1.17)--with four words that are to be heard over and over again within the pages of Scripture. They are that important. They are these: "Do not be afraid."

It seems that the move out of one's fictional self into one's true self is never undertaken, let alone ever accomplished, without facing down substantial, palpable fear. Ultimately, it is our fear that keeps us locked in our fictions and away from our truer, greater selves.

--The quest for discovering who we truly are under God is an exciting one, though it is also one that, despite any trepidation, merits "leaving everything," that is to say, leaving behind especially all those self-defeating fabrications and fibs that we keep telling ourselves--that we are nothing, that we mean nothing, that in the big scheme of things we count for nothing.

"But, I'm just a . . ."--fill in the blank for yourself. But?! Just?!

Truly, in Jesus' encouragement for us to become followers, it is quite the compelling invitation that is made to us. It is just the sort of invitation that entails following his example--the man who knows who he is, the man who is who he is, no matter the audience before whom he stands at the moment. It is just the sort of invitation that would have us being as true to the course of our lives as Jesus was true to the course of his own. That is to follow him.

Remember, God calls people from their existing ways of life to new ways of life. God calls people from what they think they are to what they genuinely are. God calls us from what we too frequently have settled for and calls us to something that is more authentic, to something that is fuller, richer, and more abundant.

--In short, it's time for us to stop with all the excuses. It's time for us to get real.

If it's your time, to what are you being called?
To what are we being called?