

Matthew 4:12-22 (NIV)

¹² When Jesus heard that John (the Baptist) had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven* has come near.”

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

*Or "Empire of the Heavens"

Life on Mission: Not as Pressure, but Adventure

Well, last Sunday our passage from John's Gospel recounted the first encounter Jesus had with three men who would come to be His disciples. There was Andrew; and then an unnamed man who is generally believed to be John, the writer of that Gospel; and then Andrew's brother: Simon Peter. And, in preaching on that passage, Dcn Dolores spoke about living aware of God's presence with us, as Andrew and that other disciple accepted Jesus' invitation to spend the day with Him. But toward the end of her sermon she made some observations about how Andrew then went and shared with Simon Peter about what he had experienced in his time with Jesus. And Dolores suggested Andrew's motivation and approach to Peter was differed from the motivations and approaches that are often at play in our day when Christians feel compelled to share about Christ with others. I would assume that many of us have experienced feelings of pressure to or guilt around “sharing our faith” and perhaps anxiety about the possibility of “failing”; while I would guess most of us have also noticed others sharing about their faith who seem motivated by such anxiety or using pressure tactics to get others to make certain faith decisions. But, in contrast to that, Andrew's approach to his brother was motivated purely by an open-ended joy of what he had discovered in his time with Jesus.

Well, today, in our scriptures we've gone from the Gospel of John to Matthew's Gospel, where he recounts a second encounter between Jesus and these brothers Andrew & Simon Peter, followed by Jesus encountering John and with *his brother* James. So I want to draw on it to unpack even further what Dcn Dolores spoke about by framing the call of God for each of us to “live on mission” that is more biblical and spiritually healthy than many of the common approaches out there of people sharing with others about following Jesus. And I will also be drawing on *some* of what we talked about in our course a few Lents ago about “Life on Mission”, based on the scholarship of Gravity Commons, to proclaim this good news: that, in calling (us as) His followers to live on mission, God never intended this to be a source of anxiety or pressure for us. Rather, it is an invitation into an adventure that will be life-giving to us, with joyous surprises all along the way.

So, the first thing I want to sort-of deconstruct about living on mission, with others we live among or encounter, is this feeling of pressure: for many of us when we think about engaging others about Christ some of us may get a feeling of guilt about not really doing it, or not “doing it enough”, whatever enough

means. And for some of us this pressure has led to this sense that to be faithful to “live on mission” we need to find ways to steer every conversation toward Jesus or Christian living. But instead, the way Jesus has called us to live on mission is by simply being open and available to where He may invite us to partner with Him to engage someone about *where or how* we have found living water, in the sense of more abundant spiritual life in Christ. But to engage them without seeking to *control any outcome(s) or produce any “results”*.

So, if “living on mission” is not about operating under pressure or anxiety to *make things happen*, but simply being available and open to opportunities where God invites us to partner with Him, the next question is what do those opportunities look like? How do we identify them? And that’s where the concept of “People of Peace” can really be helpful. I’ve shared about People of Peace¹ before, and we certainly talk about it in Kairos Groups, but even for those of you who’ve heard it I think looking at it again can be really valuable because it can be hard to get our minds around *and keep in mind* in our relationships to others; anxiety and the impulse to control outcomes are often crouching (right) at our door. The concept of a person of peace does not refer to someone who is just *nice* to us or a flower child or something. Rather, it is gleaned from Luke 10:1-12 and refers to someone whom God is inviting us *in particular* to point toward something about the way Jesus. And the three indications that God is inviting us to do this - that someone *is* a Person of Peace *for us* - is [1] when their posture toward you is one of welcome, [2] when they show some desire to serve *you* in some way, [3] as well as an openness to receive from you spiritually, indicated by a curiosity about you with what seems like a desire to want more from life (spiritually) than they have right now. So I’ve printed these 3 characteristics in your bulletin:

1. For someone to show welcome toward us could mean they are already friends with us or display they care about and see us in some way.
2. But then, they also show some desire to serve or contribute *to you* in some way.² They show they want to be a blessing to *us* in some way. So there’s a mutuality there.
3. However, someone can have both of these characteristics and still not be a person of peace. They may just be a kind person, but not actually interested in things of the spirit. So, that final element is a crucial indicator: do they show any indication of wanting more in life and demonstrate curiosity about what you “have”?

Friends, if someone doesn’t exhibit all three of these indicators, don’t stress about engaging them in spiritual matters. In fact, to feel obliged to do so when these indicators are *not* present, could very well do more damage (spiritually) than good. So we can chill out and leave that in God’s hands.

And, I want to suggest that this posture of not trying to engage everyone we encounter spiritually is even evident in this gospel passage today. Have you ever noticed that James & John are there working with their father, but Jesus only calls the two sons to follow Him. In the past that’s stood out to me, and frankly it hasn’t sat well with me. Does Jesus not care about their dad? But this week it occurred to me that maybe the father hadn’t exhibited these characteristics (showing himself to be a person of peace to/for Jesus). And this doesn’t mean he didn’t later or that he would never come to Jesus (we don’t know the future for him), but for whatever reason on that day Jesus discerned it was not the time for Mr. Zebedee. [And Jesus doesn’t seem like He was gonna stress about it, either.]

The good news is that, in calling (us as) His followers to live on mission, God never intended this to be a source of anxiety or pressure for us. Rather, it is an invitation into an adventure that will be life-giving to us, with joyous surprises all along the way. So, Jesus is inviting us to live on mission in this way, freeing us from the negative feelings of pressure or anxiety about, but also re-framing it as His invitation to us for a life-giving adventure, that only requires being open to notice the unexpected opportunities the

SERMON SUPPLEMENT

The Three Characteristics of someone who is a “Person of Peace” for You:

1. Welcoming to you
2. A heart to serve or contribute you
3. An openness to receive from you

¹ This is a concept taught by Gravity Commons

² So you are relating to each other as equals, with mutuality

Lord may have for us. Though, whenever we do detect someone who may be a person of peace to us - when someone is exhibiting all three of those characteristics toward us - what then?? How do we partner with God to be a blessing?

Well, that is where the adventure continues. And, first of all, we partner with God by first of all seeking to listen to that person. Common approaches to sharing about Jesus usually look like talking *at* people. But loving someone starts with listening to them. And, in particular, look for what concerns them, what question they seem to be asking of life, where they seem to be experiencing lack.

One of the great failures of the common approaches to sharing about Jesus are that they assume there is only one question: and that is the question of sin and our need for forgiveness. Now, it's not that this is unimportant; we are, indeed, all sinners in need of forgiveness. It's just that this is often not the question people are asking, and it certainly does not encompass *all* the life that Jesus means to bless us with. And to that point, it *is not even* the primary concern of the four would-be disciples in our gospel passage today. We often say that the dominant concern of the Jewish people leading up to Jesus' arrival was their anticipation of God's messiah, who they didn't understand would be coming to deal with their personal sin, but rather as a political savior (from Roman oppression). But with these four fishermen, Jesus seems to have discerned - perhaps during his time with them days before - that their primary need was to have a Rabbi - someone to teach them how to live - and to have some significance to their lives beyond their work as fishermen. And so, Jesus' call to them is "Come, follow me," which in that culture was understood to mean "make me your rabbi" and then, "I will send you out to fish (not merely for fish, but) for people."

So, when we lovingly listen to people, there are any number of different concerns that could be looming largest for them - they *could* be looking for meaning in their lives, or wisdom & understanding, but maybe instead they are looking for healthy & loving community, hope beyond what the broken political kingdoms of the world, solutions for food or financial insecurity, freedom from enslavement to some sin, or maybe that broader need for forgiveness - and yet we know that there is good news (to be found) about every one of those concerns through the Good Shepherd, Jesus. And I can tell you that partnering with God in this way, regardless of outcomes, there is no greater adventure in life to be had. The good news is that, in calling (us as) His followers to live on mission, God never intended this to be a source of anxiety or pressure for us. Rather, it is an invitation into an adventure that will be life-giving to us, with joyous surprises all along the way.

Now, for when we do point a Person of Peace toward Jesus' living water *for their particular concern*, and we do so without anxiety or pressuring *them*, I want to give three encouragements about outcomes or results.

1. First, maybe they will respond as we hope or maybe they won't. But either way, we can be at peace, because God has only called us to love (- to partner with Him -) but He has not made us responsible for results. So, we can leave the results to Him and trust that He cares more about the well-being of this person than we ever could!
2. But second, we also need to calibrate our goal for someone. Where common American models approaches to sharing about Jesus are focused particularly on non-believers and define success as whether a person crosses the line of conversion, from unbelief to belief, a more biblical model for the aim and hope of our "life on mission" is just to love people wherever they are toward taking just another step into *the eternal way* of living in Jesus; and that step *could* be conversion, or it could be one more step closer to conversion, but it could also look like someone who is already a Christian taking a step toward more abundant life and freedom in Jesus.

And *this* aim & hope for others is so much more biblical than the conversion-obsessed model of mission, because it's what we see was Jesus' aim throughout the gospels. Yes, He sometimes called those who weren't following Him to then begin to follow Him, but sometimes He was simply inviting people to live a little more in reality and God's truth than they were right then, such as by telling them a parable that might just sit ferment in their brain for a while. Furthermore, once people began to follow Him, Jesus wouldn't stop calling them further into a life of grace and truth. The four men in our gospel begin to follow Jesus on that day, and then for the rest of Jesus' earthly life He

continues to call and direct them to take still further steps into truth. Beginning to follow Jesus is just a step toward many more future steps, for them *and* for us! #

3. And this leads me third and finally to the encouragement for when we engage with someone who may be a person of peace to us, which is to be ready for surprises: not just for how God could move in their lives, but in our own life (as well). Sometimes God's primary purpose in an interaction with a Person of Peace is not to lead them somewhere through us, but to lead us somewhere through them. Because we are never finished products *ourselves*! And every additional step we might take toward living more fully in the way of Jesus, which will only be a blessing to us and those we love.

But for this to be a possibility it requires that we engage people as not just having something to give - to offer them - but as a person who continues to be in need of even more of God's grace & truth *ourselves*. And if we take this posture of openness to receive - even or including from non-believers - we can prepare to be surprised by how God will use others to reveal further steps - or further drinks we can take - of His living water.

And there is no greater adventure than making life a partnership with the Lord like this, for the sake of others and *ourselves*. The good news is that, in calling (us as) His followers to live on mission, God never intended this to be a source of anxiety or pressure for us. Rather, it is an invitation into an adventure that will be life-giving to us, with joyous surprises all along the way.

In the Name of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, Amen.