

All In

Let's take a poll. Who likes to wade carefully into the shallow end so as to allow your body plenty of time to ease in and adjust to the temperature of the water?

Who likes to jump right in? I think how we answer this question tells us a lot about how we approach changes in our lives and our ability to transition quickly and commit fully.

For example, I answered the first question yes. I like to wade carefully into the shallow end so I can let my body have plenty of time to ease in and adjust to the temperature of the water. And, as a follow up, I like that this option gives me the further option to bow out and say, "You know what, I think I'm okay just up to my shins today."

Although there is a part of me, in life, that likes to jump right in and see what will happen. Not in water, mind you but in life. Like I did when I quit my job at the Post Office when I was 24 and moved to some small town in Wilmore, KY to start college. I didn't know what I was doing but I thought, let's give it a go and see what happens.

I know, let's go to Haiti on a Mission trip, how hard can it be? (it was so hard I was sick the entire time)

Let's make a statement for Ded and his sanctuary case and walk 90 miles to the capitol. Let's do it!

Same thing happened when I was invited to bear witness at the border to the cruel immigration policies of the past administration (doesn't that sound nice to say the past administration!) I said, sure I will go, and then I was staring into the eyes of the Border Patrol.

It's kind of like the disciples when Jesus calls them to the Sea of Galilee. They don't hesitate. They don't turn back; they dropped their nets and they followed Jesus. They were all in.

But I sometimes wonder, how I would have responded to that call. I mean, let's be honest, if the boat was far enough off, I likely would not have jumped out of it and swam to shore, because I don't jump in the water....BUT I wonder – given my personality type, would I have waded slowly over or jumped right in. Would I have left the life I knew, the life I was comfortable with and followed Jesus?

In 2003, there was a management book on the best seller list called "The Answer To How is Yes – Acting on What Matters. The premise of the book is that we get hung up on "how" to do things – how can we attract more families to the church? How can we share the gospel of justice and transformation with those around us? How can I deepen my faith, improve my relationship with my family, my community.

We ask all these "how" questions as a way of avoiding the fact that we have never said, "Yes" in the first place. Our hearts aren't convinced; our wills hesitate. We say "Yes, Yes" with our mouths, but its "no, no" with our eyes. So instead of saying "Yes" to God and listening for our marching orders, we ask "How?" and start listing all the reasons it won't work.

“How can we get people to google our website? Oh, I don’t know, how about actively using it and inviting friends to check it out?”

“How can we get new families into the church? Oh, I don’t know, bring a new family to church some Sunday, or send them the link?”

“How can we deepen our lives together to make a more alive community?” Oh, I don’t know, show up and make a point of getting to know the people we don’t know well?”

Yes, is the heart that hears and responds. “How?” is the heart that can’t hear.

When we say “yes”, God takes us to the next step of the way. When we say, “Let us think about it,” God leaves us where we are, thinking. Because God doesn’t care if we are able, God just needs us to be available, available for God’s purposes, which may not be our own.

Andrew and Peter are out in their boat fishing. Because we learned last week from Alina Biernat, that is what disciples do, they fish. That is their job; that’s how they make it in the world. They are fishermen. But Jesus doesn’t care that they’re fishermen. When Jesus calls them to follow, he isn’t calling them to help them catch more fish. He isn’t calling them to make them better, more productive netters. He is calling them to follow him, for God’s purposes, and not their own.

And if God is calling them to follow, the proper answer isn’t “how” because we have no idea how. We don’t know what following will entail. The answer is either yes or no.

If the answer is no, God says “fine” and leaves us there with our nets to perfect our skill at catching fish. If the answer is Yes, then God says “Wonderful. Put down your nets and come along.” Put away something we need, something we value...in order to seek something that we need and value more.

Getting married means giving up our bachelor and bachelorette ways. We give up getting to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. We give up spending our money any way we wish. We give up not being accountable. Giving up bachelor and bachelorette-hood means giving up a lot.

If we do decide to take the plunge, we do it because we are seeking something we value more. Growing deep into an intimate relationship. Having someone to come home to every night. Having someone we can count on to love.

We give up one thing, because we value something else more. We don’t say, “Oh, how will I figure out how to be married?” We say “yes” and then we live into what that means.

When Jesus calls us, he is calling us into an intimate, personal relationship with him. That’s what Jesus was doing when he called the disciples: come, be a part of my life.

Now, we don’t marry strangers – at least not in our culture. We marry those we know deeply and who know us deeply. This story of the calling of the disciples as we read it in Matthew,

mark and Luke doesn't give any indication that Jesus even knew their names. There is no compelling reason why they should follow, except Jesus said so.

But this same story found in the Gospel of John gives a little different twist. In the Gospel of John, Andrew and a friend track Jesus down. They are curious about him because their teacher, John the Baptist, has been talking about him. So they go to Jesus, and then they go with Jesus and by the end of the day, they're convinced that Jesus is the Messiah.

So then Andrew brings Jesus to his brother Simon – and Jesus not only knows Simon's name, but gives him a new name, his true name – Peter. Simon hadn't known his real name until Jesus spoke it, but it resonated deep and true. This is who I am. I am Peter, the Rock. And Peter left his life and followed Jesus, just like that.

It means the world to us if the person who is calling us knows our name. It makes even more difference if they help us hear our true name as if for the first time. And when we follow, we begin to live into our new name. When we follow, we become what we were meant to be..

When Jesus called the disciples, an important shift happened as the world now experienced a social dimension of God's work in this world through Jesus. God is not some far away deity, but here on earth, in a human body, experiencing life with the rest of us. And even more than that, Jesus is now asking people to work with him, to walk along side him and learn from him and live out his ministry here on earth.

This narrative of Jesus calling the disciples is unusual for its time, because typically disciples would seek out Hellenistic philosophers or Jewish rabbis to learn from, and not the other way around. In this case, the initiative comes from Jesus.

Jesus knew the work he had ahead of him, he knew he needed a group of disciples, not only to help him in his early life, but also to carry out that work after he was gone. Jesus needed people not only to follow him, but to be all in; to be willing to leave their lives behind them and do something completely different.

Scripture says and immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus. Immediately. They jumped into the deep end. They did not turn back. They were all in.

Are you all in when it comes to following Jesus. I want to talk about what it means to be all in this morning. Because as much as I abhor using guilt tactics to get people here and involved, I really do believe that the work we do at Central matters. Our faith is not only an important part of our lives, but it is also a crucial part of what can and will make this world a better place. We cannot be passive in our quest to follow Christ and spread the Gospel in the world – we have to be all in. All in.

We have to be willing to put down our fishing nets. We have to be willing to leave our boats and our families. We have to be willing to follow Jesus with the one simple command, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Wouldn't it be nice if faith and church just kind of fit into our lives? If we did not have to make any sacrifice along the way.

But that's not how it works. That is never how it was supposed to work. Jesus didn't wait for disciples to seek him out so they could continue on their quest for knowledge. He didn't find disciples in the temple who had already carved out time and space in their lives for worship and learning. He called fishermen from their boats and asked them to walk away from their lives and their livelihoods so that they could follow him. He asked these men to make sacrifices, to change who they were so they could be who God was calling them to be.

How many of us would be willing to do that? How many of us would be that all in?

The social dimension of God's work in this world is still very much relevant and very much necessary in our world today. We, too, must be willing to abandon parts of our world in order that we might fully follow Jesus. We too, must be willing to let go of something that is safe and secure and trust that God is leading us in the right direction. We, too, must be all in, in our faith so that we can continue to write this Christian narrative in our lives today.

This is going to look different for each one of us and it might even look different for us at different points throughout our lives and in the life of the church. Sometimes it might mean small changes and sometimes it might mean big changes. Sometimes it will ask little of us and sometimes it will ask a whole lot of us.

But we have to be all in. We have to make a commitment. We have to know that it is not our will to be done here on earth, but God's will. We have to be willing to put the needs of others and God's call for us ahead of our own wants and desires. We have to see Jesus in our lives and abandon our metaphorical fishing nets so that we can follow and proclaim the Gospel for all the world to see.

So let us jump in without looking back. Let us be all in! Amen.