



What Do You Want?

TEXT
Mark 1:16–20

September 20, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

We started this series “Road Trip” with this quotation: “The least you can do with your life is figure out what you hope for; the most you can do is to live inside that hope.” I want to talk about that some more today.

One of the first stories of our faith is the call of Abraham. God calls Abraham to leave his father, his home and go to a “land that I will show you.” Follow me and I will make you the father of a great nation. It’s a pretty big promise to an old man who is childless. Abram followed and, in time, it happened just as God promised.

Well, this is the same story. Jesus does the calling this time, and it’s not Abraham, but Peter, Andrew, James and John. But the story is the same. Jesus calls them to leave everything behind; even the old man Zebedee is left in the boat. They leave a life they know, and he promises to make them fishers of people. I assume that was more meaningful than fishers of fish. Anyway, they went.

I have often read this as a story of sacrifice, paying attention to what they leave behind. Their lives, as far as we can tell,

were just fine the way they were. They had good jobs. They had tradition and family. Life was good. But Jesus comes along, and they drop all of that and they hit the road.

There had to be something compelling about this trip. I think Jesus does that. I think Jesus creates a hunger in us for a more authentic life, a more righteous life. That hunger puts us on the road.

But I have to confess, if Jesus said, “Tom, I’ll make you a fisher of people,” I might stay home. It doesn’t sound that compelling to me. But what would? What would get you on the road? What do you want?

It’s not a question about our basic desires — like I want more ice cream in my life, or I want to lose some weight because of all the ice cream in my life. It’s not about careers; they don’t completely get at this. It’s not the bucket list question: Do you want to see Alaska?

I mean when it’s all said and done, what do you want your life to have meant? What do you want to contribute?

I think these disciples hit the road because they got ambitious. Oh, that’s a risky word: ambition.

I was on the phone recently with an Elder from a church on

the East Coast. He is serving on a Pastor Nominating Committee searching for a new pastor, and they had zeroed in on a friend of mine. He was making a reference check.

We talked about my friend, who is a wonderful pastor, and then the caller said: “Tom, someone said this guy is ambitious. That doesn’t sound like a word to describe a pastor.”

“I don’t think of Christians as being ambitious,” he said.

I know what he means. We hear ambition, and it brings to mind the person who is all out for themselves. “Hey, look at me.” It’s self-focused, even arrogant. And there is nothing Christian about being arrogant.

But let’s drill down on this a bit. James K.A. Smith said this: “Ambition is not a lack of humility; it is a lack of sloth and complacency.” He continues, “We sometimes like to comfort ourselves by imagining that the ambitious are prideful and arrogant so that those of us who never risk, never aspire, never launch out into the deep get to wear the moralizing mantel of humility. But this imagining is often just thin cover for a lack of courage, even laziness.”¹

To get on the road with Jesus, it takes courage. We said that

last week. And it takes work; we can't be lazy. Because that is true, I think there has to be something we want, something we have yet to know that launches us on this journey of faith. I think Jesus came to people who thought their life was fine, and he created in them a hunger, an ambition for life to be different.

There was a day this past week when what I wanted was just some respite from the world. I didn't want an update on COVID. I didn't want to learn about the fires in the West and the storms in South, made worse by climate change. I didn't want to see another protest, or see a protest that was joined by looters or gun-toting vigilantes. I didn't want to see another Black man brutalized or another police officer attacked. I wanted a break.

You probably have moments when you want to wash your hands of all the trouble in the world, to just find a safe place and rest.

Everyone needs that sometimes. I imagine God feels that way too sometimes. How is it that God hasn't looked down on us and thought, "They are never going to get it right. They are going to continue to live in fear and injure one another. They will continue to call the light darkness and the darkness light. Forget it. I'll make me a new world and forget about this one."

But instead, God clearly decided, "I better go down there, where it hurts. I better go down there where folks are afraid. I better go down there and heal what's broken."

That's the reason Jesus found himself beside that lake. He came to make us hungry, to reform our ambitions and to show us what we really want.

During these days of COVID, I've been thinking anew about what I want — wants that I pray are informed by what God wants.

I want the people I love in this world to trust that I love them; that includes this congregation.

I want people who work for a living to be able to afford a living.

I want us to take seriously that not everyone is treated the same in this country and that to say so is not political but faithful.

I want leaders to tell the truth, and for the rest of us to expect the truth.

I want children to be safe, and scientists to be believed, and music to be frequent.

I want us to recognize we can't love America while hating Americans.

I want making a buck to be an honorable endeavor, but not an excuse for another's suffering.

I want freedom to be a declaration of my responsibilities more than an assertion of my rights.

I want us to remember that truth is always complex, so you can, for example, support police and still demand an end to brutality; you can protest and still eschew violence.

I want a willingness to sacrifice for the common good to no longer be seen as the life choices of losers, but as something to be admired.

I want friendships to determine how we see the issues, rather than issues determining who our friends are.

I want children to go to schools where they can learn not just skills for a job, but can learn to be adults.

And I want kindness to be the power that defines human relationships.

I want us to remember that worship is not just an experience, but a discipline, a regular return to the source of our lives.

And I want to be more faithful tomorrow than I was yesterday.

I'm not telling you what you should want. I'm telling you that when I think about Jesus, these are some of the longings that emerge in me.

So, do the same. Think about the life of Jesus and ask yourself, "What do you want?"

¹James K. A. Smith, *On the Road With St. Augustine* (2019), p. 79