

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A, Isaiah
9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 5-13
1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I'm probably about to reveal more about my taste in films than I ought to, but here goes. Ten years ago, Quentin Tarantino followed up his box office smash hit, *Pulp Fiction* with a movie that I think is eminently better. In my opinion, his story telling in *Jackie Brown* puts his work in *Pulp Fiction* to shame. One of the things I love about *Jackie Brown* is the device Tarantino uses to tell us how the story unfolds from the viewpoint of various characters. In the climactic scene, we get to see what happens through the eyes of different characters, which means that he shot the scene multiple times with cameras in different places. Then Tarantino shows the audience the same scene over again, from different points of view, so that the viewer can experience the story unfolding as the different characters did. To me, it's a fascinating story telling device and I love the way it works in the film. So how would this morning's Gospel story of the calling of the first disciples look if Quentin Tarantino were to tell it?

Well, aside from the fact that he would find a way to inject a lot of blood and profanity into the story – which really aren't needed in this particular case – it would be interesting to see how this would have looked from an angle other than Jesus'.

Matthew gives us the overview of this story, but it's really told from Jesus' perspective. Jesus is just beginning His public ministry and moves to Capernaum. As He walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He sees Simon Peter and Andrew, brothers who work as fishermen. He calls out to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people," and they drop their nets and follow him. Then a little farther down the beach, He repeats this process with James and John, the sons of Zebedee – also fishermen. And again, they immediately drop their nets, leave their father in the boat and follow Him.

But what does this story look like from James' point of view, for instance? Let's go to the shore of the Galilean Sea and take a look.

It is such a beautiful day. Spring is coming and it's beginning to warm up. I love fishing at this time of year. God has been very good to this family. We've got this business that is absolutely booming and soon we are going to have to buy another boat. The fishing has been so good, and I work with my dad and my brother. It's really a pleasure to fish with men who are good at what they do, and good company out here on the lake. God is indeed good. Hmm, who is that coming down the shore? It looks like Simon and Andrew. But who is that with them – and why have they left their boat? I saw them not 30 minutes ago, working the nets. They can't possibly be finished yet. But there they are, and they're waving at us. I know who that is – that's that new Rabbi who just got into town, Jesus I think he's called. Look at that preacher. There's something about him. I don't know what it is, but I can't seem to take my eyes off him. Somehow it just seems like I ought to trust what He says. He just seems like someone a man ought to follow when he speaks. What is he saying? Come with me? Fish for people? I have no idea what He is talking about. "Dad. I've got to go. No. I don't know when I'll be back. Yes, John is coming too. I have to. I can't explain it. I just have to. Tell mom we won't be home for dinner. I know. I'm sorry. I love you. Good-bye."

This discipleship thing is not so easy to explain – even with great story telling devices. James and John, sitting there minding their own business one minute and the next minute they've left everything they know – everything they own – and they're off to follow an itinerate preacher with no known source of income. They couldn't possibly have explained that to Zebedee. And imagine what the conversation must have been like in the kitchen with Salome, their Jewish mother that night. "They did what? They just left? Just like that? Who's going to handle their jobs? What's going to happen to

the business without them? You're too old to do this by yourself. Oy, what will we do? They must be crazy – and they'll drive me that way, too.”

James and John didn't know it then, but their “immediate” decision to drop everything and follow Jesus was going to continue to have such consequences. Just a few years later, king Herod Agrippa would have James beheaded for preaching about Jesus. And although John lived a long life, he did his writing at the end from exile on the island of Patmos because of his support for the Gospel of Christ. What makes someone leave everything behind to become a disciple? Simply put, it's faith.

Faith is a belief in that which cannot be seen – or proven. James and John believed in God and in God's incarnation, Jesus Christ enough to lead lives based upon that belief. But that kind of faith didn't begin with them. Abraham had faith enough to leave his home and go to a land designated by God to be his new land. Moses had faith enough to lead a recalcitrant group through the desert for forty years, just because God said so. And fortunately, that kind of faith also didn't *end* with James and John either. Now in Tarantino fashion, let's cut to a seemingly unrelated scene in modern-day America.

A man is sitting with friends from the office, having a beer after work. He glances at his watch, sees that it's almost 6:00 pm and he suddenly realizes that it's Ash Wednesday. He can make the service if he hurries. Although there are churches closer than his own, they don't enter his thoughts as he rushes away from his mystified colleagues and races to his parish church. He slides into the pew just as the recitation of Psalm 51 starts. Even though he's still a little out of breath from trying to get to church on-time and it all seems so rushed, the familiar words of the Psalmist take on new meaning. He *knows* that this time when he says “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out all my sins,” all of his sins have been blotted out. He doesn't hear the words of the Litany of Penitence at all. All he can hear are his own words, going through his head over

and over again, “you want me to do what? Leave everything we’ve worked so hard for here and do what? Seek ordination why? What happens to my family? This is crazy.” And there is not a single answer to any of those internal questions except for the repeated, “because *you need* to.” He sat through the rest of the service, marveling at what had just taken place. In an instant he had decided to upend his life, to give up everything he had worked so hard for – and to give up everything on behalf of his family as well – and yet he felt completely at peace with that decision.

Discipleship is indeed a strange thing. When God calls us we *know* at a very primal level who it is who is calling. Unfortunately, we have grown so wary of what other people will have to say about our being in personal contact with God that we don’t tell people about these things. As St. Luke says about the mother of Jesus in his Gospel, and “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart¹.” That’s what we tend to do – treasure the times when we hear God’s voice, and ponder it in our hearts – out of fear of the unknown – rather than reacting and following the call to be a disciple.

In typical Tarantino fashion, the moral of today’s story is a little twisted from what you might have thought. The moral is not that we should all drop our fishing nets and go and follow Jesus and become fishers of people. We are not all called to the same ministry. Even St. Paul – in all his greatness – wasn’t called to do it all. As we heard from him this morning, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel,” No, the moral of the story this morning is this ... we are all called by God. Some in very dramatic ways, some in very quiet ways; some to ministries that seem extreme, others to very understated ministries – but we are ALL called.

What is the discipleship mission God has in mind for you? Lent is coming. It is the perfect time to be still and listen for God’s voice, to see what God has in mind for you. Maybe it will be something

¹ Luke 2:19, NRSV

big and seemingly risky, like stepping into a leadership role at St. John's. Perhaps God will tell you that you need to be involved in a brand new and unfamiliar type of ministry, something that stretches your understanding of God and of yourself. Maybe God will call you to give of yourself more than you ever have, in time, talent AND treasure. But maybe God will just ask that you make a new commitment to prayer and to attending church every week of the Lenten season.

I don't know what God will call you to. But I know that God calls, all the time. If we will listen, and trust that it is God we hear, amazing discipleship opportunities will open up for us. And like James and John, if we're faithful enough to hear and respond, our lives will never be the same again. It's scary, but it's so worth it.

Amen.