

FPC Allegan 2/10/2013

### Exodus 3:1-12

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.<sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”<sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”<sup>5</sup> “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”<sup>6</sup> Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.<sup>7</sup> The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.<sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.<sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.<sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”<sup>12</sup> And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you<sup>[a]</sup> will worship God on this mountain.”

### Luke 5:1-11 THE MESSAGE

Once when he was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon’s and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.

<sup>4</sup> When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, “Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch.”

<sup>5-7</sup> Simon said, “Master, we’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I’ll let out the nets.” It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.

<sup>8-10</sup> Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. “Master, leave. I’m a sinner and can’t handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.” When they pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee’s sons, coworkers with Simon.

<sup>10-11</sup> Jesus said to Simon, “There is nothing to fear. From now on you’ll be fishing for men and women.” They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed him.

In a village in the Philippines in the Bunawan province in September 2011, the village elders knew that they needed to do something. Back in July one of their fishermen went missing in the river, and some of the villagers had a number one suspect as to what had became of him. -- There had been long been talk of sightings of a massive male crocodile in their river from which they gleaned their livelihood, but the reported size of the animal had been disputed and argued about in the village for years.

But in the beginning of September of 2011 when several village eyewitnesses saw this crocodile take down and eat a full grown water buffalo, the elders knew that they had to face up the size of their growing problem. The Mayor, Edwin Cox Eldore called for help from a crocodile farm in a nearby province. Their veteran croc hunters and the villagers together set out four of their biggest crocodile traps and waited through the night. Sure enough, the croc arrived and took the bait, but he completely destroyed all four of their traps in the process. After consulting together, the group created custom croc traps using steel cables and again baited them along the river.

On that Saturday night, they all heard a ruckus when one of those custom traps was successful but everyone was stunned at the size of the river monster that was now thrashing in the water at the end of the steel cables.

It was simply the biggest crocodile that anyone had ever seen. It took 100 people to drag the reluctant croc out of the river and to a nearby clearing. From there the tranquilized croc had to be lifted up by a crane before it was placed in a truck. When the statistics came in, the people could hardly believe it. The adult male crocodile measured 21 feet long, and weighed in at 2,370 pounds. Everyone could see the power of those huge deadly jaws and how dangerous it was to have such a beast loose in their river.

But instead of killing the monster and putting an end to it, the villagers had a much better idea. They put the croc into a very secure fenced area and put plans into motion to build an ecotourism park, with the huge croc as its star attraction. The massive crocodile, instead of being a liability for the town, was turned into an asset as a new source of tourism income for the impoverished area. By capturing the crocodile alive, and building a new

habitat for it; both the crocodile and the village were given a new chance at a new way of life.

In our scripture today, a similar thing is happening. Simon was a fisherman on Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. Life as a fisherman was hard. You and your families livelihood depended on how good the daily catch was. Here in Luke we find Simon and his partners discouraged after an unsuccessful night on the water. Without fish to sell in the market, or even enough to eat themselves, their life was going to be a struggle. Here we find Simon and his partners as not so very successful fishermen. But instead of leaving Simon and his partners James and John to their dead end jobs, Jesus instead gives them the opportunity for a brand new life. Simon and his business partners are captured alive and given a new purpose in life.

The Greek word that Jesus uses here also conveys this sense. When Jesus talks about Simon's new life of "catching" people, it isn't the same work as catching fish in order to kill, gut and eat them. The word that Jesus uses here is "Zogreο" which is a word specifically used to describe capturing someone alive. Homer used this word in his description of war to describe prisoners of war that were taken alive rather than simply killed.

The word has the connotation of taking someone out of a very deadly situation and giving them a second chance at life.

In our first Scripture today from Exodus, Moses also is called out of his life by God for a new purpose. We find him in one of the most mundane of jobs in scripture, tending sheep on the mountain side. And in a very similar way to the call of Simon in Luke, God does something amazing in order to get Moses' attention. A bush is on fire, but it is not burning up! As Moses approaches it in amazement, God speaks to Moses out of the bush and tells him that he will lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt. In both the story of the call of Simon and this story of the call of Moses, despite their amazement both Simon and Moses try to turn down the call of God on their lives. Both men doubt that they have what it takes to leave their lives that they are used to and to follow God in a whole new way. But neither of these characters are given any room to give in to their doubts, God compels them to follow their new way of life despite their excuses.

In Pierrefonds, Quebec, the area of Cloverdale has the embarrassing distinction of having the most public housing in all of Canada. Growing up in this poor hard knocks environment was one young man named Asmick Jean-Jacques. With lots of unsupervised time, Asmick got himself into

trouble with the law. When he was 12 years old, he was arrested for the first time for shoplifting. The life of crime that he had turned to was not just a phase. It was a way of life, and Asmick joined one of the numerous gangs in the area and soon was involved in an entire range of illegal activities. As he became a legend on the streets as an extremely violent and powerful man, his days of freedom came to an end when he was arrested for armed robbery and sentenced to nine years in jail. Even in prison, Asmick's embraced the violence in his environment. His choices caused him to spend many years in solitary confinement, spending 23 out of every 24 hours completely alone. He described himself as a beast, a beast who was kept in a cage.

One of the options available to Asmick in prison was to be able to speak to a pastor. Initially asking to meet with the chaplain in order to get out of solitary for an extra hour a day, Asmick met with the man who spoke of something that he didn't even recognize as existing. The pastor spoke of the love of Christ for him and for everyone. At first Asmick didn't believe it, but the pastors words worked on his heart during those hours alone.

And one day, May 18th, 2002; was the day that Asmick changed his life direction forever. In his own words he said:

*"I was looking in the mirror and I realized, life has got to be more than money, power, and respect," "My life has to be better than (chasing those things). I decided to follow Christ. The love of God through (the pastor) made a crack in my shield."*

When Asmick got out of prison, he returned to his old neighborhood of Pierrefonds, but instead of going back to his old gang member friends, Asmick became a pastor, he began to coach football and started to spend the bulk of his time volunteering at the La Corde youth center. For years, Asmick volunteered for the center. People who knew of his violent reputation from the past were still frightened of him, and it took those years of his changed behavior for many people to finally trust him.

Today, Asmick works for pay at the La Corde Youth Center and his passion is to help kids who remind him of himself when he was younger. Every week, the Center serves 500 meals to about 40 regular kids. And Asmick particularly encourages and helps the kids in their education program to get their high school diplomas. He tells them, 'Come on, you don't want to go to school? You need to finish. You need to go to college, work. You need to do your life. When you wake up in the morning you should tell yourself you're not waking up for nothing, you're working,'<sup>ii</sup>

In addition to helping the kids earn their high school diplomas, Asmick also works with the kids to give them something else to do with their time. La Corde Youth Center has created a soccer program where kids find sponsors to buy them equipment and to provide a field in which to play. The kids learn to juggle a soccer ball with their feet and for every hit sponsors pay them a small fee toward their soccer expenses. Asmick likes the program because it rewards the kids for their hard work and for learning this essential soccer skill. --The money is not just given to them, they earn it. In doing all of this work, Asmick himself has been changed and he has found his purpose in life.

*"This is more than a centre, this is home. As you can see, we laugh, we play. This is a family. We don't want to just feed them, we want to have a relationship with them," he said. "Working with kids and interacting with them and smiling... laughing. This is my environment; this is everything for me."*

So what does all of this mean for us here today?

When Moses and Simon were called out of their normal everyday life into a new way of being, they first disbeliefed it and tried to make excuses as to why they could not answer God's call. Moses said, "Who am I that you are asking me to do this amazing thing." And Simon asked Jesus to leave him

alone and to let him remain a fisherman. But our God is not one that is content with leaving people where God finds them. Instead each of us is called to a higher purpose, a higher vocation somewhere within God's universe. While for some people, like Moses and Simon it may mean leaving your career and starting out in a new direction, for others like Asmick Jean-Jacques it may mean going back to right where you started, but working for God with a new purpose.

Today, our God is calling out to you and catching your heart and saving you from a life that is self centered and self serving to a life that loves God and others as well as yourself. God is calling you to a new way of existing and being.

May we all have the courage to make that change and to follow the call of God no matter where that call leads us.. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.westislandchronicle.com/News/Local/2010-05-25/article-1153794/Ex-convict-turned-community-saviour/1>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://montreal.ctvnews.ca/power-of-one-ex-con-becomes-youth-mentor-1.786972#ixzz2KKhWIZrD>