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Church of the Holy Spirit
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Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus was a full human being with all that entails- he needed to care for his physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. The Gospel reading we just heard includes Jesus doing just that after learning that John has been arrested. In order to assess what he needs Jesus withdraws from Jerusalem, taking time to re-assess and decide what to do next. His own freedom is at risk, so he goes to his family's hometown of Nazareth first, but eventually he relocates to Capurnaum.

Doesn't the beach sound amazing on a day like today? Imagine it Jesus seeking a little R and R with water and sandy soil, beach vacations are clearly good for the soul. But Jesus doesn't go down the shore to drink mai tais, play skee ball or eat funnel cakes. He finds his way to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the outer edges of Israel's northern kingdom, the very place where Isaiah prophesied that those who had been abanondened and ignored by Jerusalem, by the leaders of Israel, would be lead out of their great darkness and suffering. On the shores of Galilee, in this moment of personal distress and darkness Jesus contemplates what is next.

He grieves for his cousin, companion, and colleague, John, as he stands on the shore, looking out at the horizon. As the waves crash in front of him, perhaps he remembers the promises that have been made, the prophecies that have been shared, the dreams that have been interpreted, and the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation in this land.

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be numerous, like the grains of sand on the shore, and the stars in the firmament overhead. God had fulfilled this promise to Abraham and Jesus is part of that promise. Descended from Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Leah and Rachel, according to the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel is concerned. Jesus and Abraham are blood relations, not just culturally or religiously aligned.

Jesus stands in a transcendent place. Where God made a distinction between what was and what would be. The place Jesus stands was promised to the Jewish people, to Abraham and his seed forever, but as with every other empire that invaded, occupied, or evicted the Jewish people from this land, the Romans didn't abide by God's promise. Once again the people are suffering in the land of Zebulan and Naphtali.

As stewards of the promise given to Abraham and Sarah the patriarch and matriarch Israel, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, continued to live in this region. Within the shifting borders of different kingdoms, they moved nomadically settling for a time where food and water were available for livestock. Leaving them often at the mercy of whichever ruler claimed ownership of the land where they found themselves.

These fluid boders were often the first occupied, and last defended by the authorities in Jerusalem. In part because ownership of the land was not thought to be possible, human beings were stewards of what belonged to and was beloved by God. It was given to their keeping, not owned by an individual or tribe, the

Israelites did not think of land as property as we do today.

The land where Jesus stood, was a land of promise, a land where Hebrew people knew great things unfold. Standing on the sand where God made promises to Abraham, to expect great things, Jesus may be hoping for great things himself, a sign perhaps, something to guide his decisions and get him out of this dark place.

Jesus has responded to God's promise, John has baptized him, and knows the risk that he is taking if he continues on the path laid before him. He will likely be arrested, as John was. At this moment, John is just imprisoned, but death is a looming threat because Herod could at anytime order John to be executed. Recognizing the parallels to his own life and ministry with that of John the Baptizer would be enough to frighten any one.

Even Jesus, is afraid facing imprisonment and execution. Despite the fact that, Jesus is the son of God and that he is God's incarnate form - in becoming human God abdequated omniscience, omnipresense, and omnipotence to experience life, like any other human being. As Jesus experiences uncertainty, fear, doubt and worry then God begins to understand why faith is difficult for human beings to maintain.

Although Jesus stands on the shore, contemplating what is in store for him, not knowing with absolute certainty, but having trust in the promises given to his ancestors. The promises shared within his family in particular his cousin John, mother Mary, father Joseph and all those who love

and know him may have been running through his mind.

When Abraham, was lost, confused, and alone, standing on this very shore, God promised he would not die childless and alone. Jesus, likewise lost, frightened and alone, stands on the Galilean shore, watching the waves, monitoring the horizon line, listening to the lapping water on the sand and waiting for what will come to be.

There is nothing remarkable on the horizon, no rainbows or storms, nothing of consequence, which was worthy to note in scripture just some fishermen. Ordinary, run-of-the-mill Galileans who are doing the work they do day in and day out. They fish to keep themselves and their families fed, sheltered, and clothed. Andrew, Simon Peter, James, John, and their father Zebedee are the ones whose names are recorded, while there may have been others on different boats or standing in farther shallows, these four responded when he called.

Jesus offered an invitation to a new way of being. “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” he said. Where a fisherman provides nourishment for the body an 'evangelist' fishes for people, helping them find spiritual food. This new vocation required the fishermen to be willing to see the world differently. This begins by them seeing promise where others see poverty; and providing paths to healing where others percieve hopelessness.

When Jesus yells out, inviting them to join in this uncertain journey, there must have had a tone of hope, joy, and expectation in his voice. Otherwise why would they have answered this invitation to

join a new way of being. Something about Jesus inspires their shift in perspective, and profession leaving everything they knew behind to become fishers of people.

There is something that drew them together. Perhaps it is as simple as remembering that all people are made in the image of God, and when an "outsider" recognized and affirmed the image of God reflected in them Andrew, Simon, James and John were spiritually aware enough to perceive that Jesus was more than what he appeared to be.

Almost immediately their work together began. In Cappurnum Jesus was a stranger, but those he called to his side, knew the members and needs of this community. They brought Jesus to those who were ill, suffering, or living on the margins. They also brought to him those in need hope, wholeness, and healing. Those who hungered and thirst, those who were most often ignored or overlooked, if not outright abused.

Jesus saw them. Jesus loved them. Jesus healed them. Jesus fed them. This is how according to Matthew's account, Jesus finds a way out of grief and doubt, out of fear and anxiety, and into an earthly ministry that reflects and embodies the nature of God's love for all people, for the restoration of all parts of creation to wholeness, and reminds each of us that God's will does not succumb to the changes and chances of this life.

When Jesus arrived in Galilee it may have been looking for hope amidst his own despair. But as he looked at the water, stood on the sand, and called the first disciples, it was out of love and care for the many descendants of Abraham, but not only of Abraham's heirs, but all human

beings. The children of Adam and Eve, the very creatures made in Elohim's own image became Jesus saving grace, in time of sorrow and great need, Jesus, called out to strangers. Perhaps, it was initially because he saw them and their potential to be more than what they were, or because they perceived the Christ-light shining through, that they agreed to follow him, but it seems that mutual healing and hope began to take root when this relationship began, as a continuation of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Galilee.

This is where Jesus begins finds community and begins to form a new sense of being in community. By calling every day people to become agents of cosmic change.

Jesus called out in desperation and those who responded would follow him all the days of his life, and eventually their own. It is in part because of this that community is necessary to our Christian identity.

Jesus Christ calls us to respect one another's experiences and help when asked, as the disciples walked beside one another, in capurnaum. Recognizing as they did the needs that arose, it was out of love for their neighbor and respecting the other person's dignity, desires, and wishes. Things that provide for their wholeness and healing; rather than presuming knowledge of what another individual may need.

First we meet one another, then learn about one another, then we lead beside one another. There is an intentional shifting from assessing information, learning skills and being students of a school of thought, to become advocates for those who suffer, are left behind, ignored,

or exploited in society. This change requires the use of the God given gifts of memory reason and skill, to listen and learn about the context and need attempting to fix a percieved problem.

Through out our history sometimes the Church lives into this identity very well. Other times not so much. When we pause to listen and discern about what should and ought to be done to address an expressed need we are the Church at it's best. When as an institution, the Church jumps to conclusions we can actively disenfranchise the same people we are trying desperately to "help".

Learning from one another begins with building relationships. Jesus trusted, Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John who knew what was needed in Galilee. The people likewise trusted Simon, Andrew, James and John because they were neighbors. Through the mutual relationship and connection between them all Jesus is able to respond to the Galileans' needs.

Jesus ministry continues like this as all who take up the call to follow him, grow his network by becoming first disciples, then advocates and evangelists. We as baptized Christians have been empowered to do the same. We as members of Church of the Holy Spirit, walk with one another and discern what needs a response and the best way to approach it. When facing what seems like insurmountable suffering it can be tempting to do something, anything to make things better. Something is bound to be better than nothing, right? But there is value in stepping back, assessing what is the best use of the gifts, and remembering that all that we have is not really ours, but we are only stewards of what God will use to provide a lasting

solution to this need. As Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of South Africa, is credited with saying that there comes a point where we need to stop pulling people from the river, and go up stream to finding out why they keep falling in.

Yes there are immediate needs that require immediate responses, but also there are intermediate and long term responses needed as well. We at CHS function as a single community in the larger organism of the Church while each of us is called to be a companion to one another in times of need and sorrow as well as in times of joy and celebration, and we do it well here at CHS. There is no doubt that we love one another, through it all. However, we are not only called to love one another but also to call out to the strangers who are on the horizon, those who know the needs of those on the borders of our communities. We see them, we call them and in recognizing their needs as well as our own we begin to dive into a deeper more meaningful and respectful relationship like Jesus had with Andrew, Simon, James and John.

Let us endeavor to be empathetic, listeners, learners, and become like Jesus, who, even in his time of doubt, grief, and uncertainty, was able to see the promise of God's beloved creation fulfilled, not by those who assert power and authority, but those who are doing the work, and are able to respond and care for all those in any kind of need or trouble.

Amen