



Lexington Presbyterian Church

Faith • Fellowship • Service • Since 1789

A Host of Zebedees

Matthew 4:12-23 & Hebrews 12:1-2

A sermon by William M. Klein

26 January 2020

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2 NRSV)

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. **13** He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14** so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: **15** "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— **16** the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." **17** From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." **18** As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **19** And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. **23** Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. (Mt. 4:12-23 NRSV)

1

I think you know *Fiddler on the Roof* is one of my favorite movies. In one of the songs Tevye muses about all the things he could do if he were a wealthy man. I nod my head with everything he says...but when he gets to one of the last verses, my head is just a bobbin.

*If I were a rich man,
I'd discuss the learned books with the holy men
Seven hours every day...(and)
That would be the sweetest thing of all
Oy!*

Tevye's words come to mind many Tuesday mornings when I gather with folks in Room 113 for *Lectio Divina* to consider the biblical passage I'll be preaching the coming Sunday morning. Week after week we consider a biblical text all of us have read many times. We read the passage aloud and then fall into silence for 15 minutes pondering what

we just read. When we break from silence we talk about what stirred within us. I cannot tell you how often something someone else noticed or I noticed shines new light breaking the passage open. And that surely is the sweetest thing of all.

That happened this past Tuesday when we read the passage from Matthew's Gospel account. We read about Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee. There he saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, casting their nets. Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. Going along further, Jesus came upon two other brothers, James and John...both sons of a man named Zebedee. They too left their boat and their father, and followed him.

Familiar story, right? And what have you concluded about this story? Well, I think it is safe to say we have tended to think about poor old Zebedee...his two boys ran off with an itinerate preacher leaving him to do all the work.

Here is where the "ah-ha" came during *Lectio Divina*. We talked about the juxtaposition of this story from Matthew's Gospel and the passage we considered last Sunday from John's Gospel. In John's Gospel we read that John the Baptist and his disciples were standing around. When Jesus passed them by John the Baptist pointed to him and said, "That man is the Lamb of God." And immediately two of John's disciples followed after Jesus. One of them was Andrew who fetched his brother Peter to meet Jesus, too...and to spend time with him.

Thinking of the passage from John's Gospel we considered last week together with the passage from Matthew we are considering today...is it possible Andrew and Peter had met Jesus when John the Baptist told Andrew that Jesus was the Lamb of God? Is it possible Andrew and Peter returned to their home after spending time with Jesus? They resumed their fishing business. They talked to their friends, James and John, about their time with Jesus...about how extraordinary it was to be near Jesus, to hear Jesus, to see him minister to any and every one. Is it possible the four of them talked about Jesus with Zebedee, the father of James and John...that they talked about Jesus in a way Zebedee realized Jesus may well be the Lamb of God?

Tuesday a member of the cloud of witnesses that gather for *Lectio Divina* said, "You know, I think Zebedee didn't try to stop James and John from following Jesus. I think he encouraged them to go ahead and follow Jesus...to follow their heart. That's what my Dad would have done," he said.

That person's insight changes a whole lot for me. It changes it from a story about poor old Zebedee...abandoned by his thankless children...left to shoulder the fishing business by himself. It changes it from a sad tale to a tale of encouragement. Zebedee wanting the best for his sons...Zebedee being, in a real sense, God's gift to them by granting them wings to fly.

And consider this fascinating detail. In Hebrew the name Zebedee means "Gift of YHWH," "Gift of God." If, indeed, this interpretation of events is accurate and Zebedee did encourage his sons to follow Jesus...that adds a layer of meaning to this passage I have never known.

2

I want you to take a pencil out of the rack in front of you and if you can find a blank space on your bulletin I want you to write something. I want you to write the name of

2

someone who was Zebedee to you...maybe several someones who encouraged you... someones whose encouragement made all the difference. I'll give you a moment to think.

The people I think of who were like Zebedee to me are many...but I would have to think of my parents first and my little brother. Their attitudes and priorities helped shape mine. Their unconditional love of me instilled in me a certain kind of confidence and trust and humility...a kind of assurance that I am truly loved and so valued.

I want to suggest you and I are and have been surrounded by a host of Zebedees...a host of folks who have encouraged us along the way.

I think of my Dad's seminary classmates who became uncles to me and to my brother: Dave Miller, John Lyles, Woody and Neal Leech, John Evans, Fred Holder... I could tell stories about each of these men. I attended the funeral for Dave Miller last week in Black Mountain, NC. He had been a missionary serving in Africa his whole career. Because my Dad had bronchitis, he could not attend the funeral...so I spoke. And one of the things I expressed gratitude for was the way this Zebedee had taught me what it means to be a person who takes his calling very seriously but himself not too seriously. To illustrate this point I told the gathered folks that one of the earliest songs he taught me was this one: "May the bird of paradise fly up your nose."

As I think about people who were encouragers, I tend to think of the church members that have filled that bill. For me *church* growing up meant the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church (in Black Mountain, NC), the Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church (in Rock Hill, SC), and Second Presbyterian Church (Roanoke, VA).

All sorts of people in each of these churches encouraged and influenced me...too many of whose names and faces I cannot recall. But there were plenty of names I do remember. There was Polly Cooley in the Black Mountain Church. We moved from Black Mountain when I was 5 years old...but went back to visit nearly every year during my growing up years. So I can't say for sure I remember Polly from those first 5 years or from all the succeeding years. She was not family...but she was as much an aunt as I ever had. Every summer I would spend a week with her. My parents would deliver me to her house and the two of us would take hikes, climb trees, pick apples, make applesauce and ranger cookies. We would visit a local orphanage and play with the kids there. We would go to the local swimming holes. Her house was the one constant house during my growing up years...and so in many ways her house felt like my house. In fact, after I was married, Deb and I took our first child, Hannah, when she was a baby to stay for a week with my Aunt Polly.

When I was 5 we moved to Rock Hill, SC, where my Dad was pastor of the Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church. I remember the saints of that church more clearly. There were people like -

- **Bill Barron** - who was always laughing, always clowning. His eyes sparkled. No matter what happened in his life, he managed to laugh and give other people reason to laugh. He also invited black children to swim in his backyard pool when that was not done.

- **Feenie Galloway** – was one of my mom’s pals. Her laughter was so infectious and delightful that when we moved to Roanoke I occasionally asked my mom to call Feenie so I could hear her laugh.
- **Harry Goforth** – was a big imposing fellow who always set his cigar on the window ledge when he went into worship Sunday mornings and then picked it up when worship was over. He’d put that cigar on the window ledge, turn, and wink at me and my brother...and we would giggle with glee.
- **Robert Hope** – was a chicken farmer who delivered eggs door to door. Occasionally he would pick me up to go with him on his deliveries. His son, Butch, was a playmate of mine who died when he was 9 from cancer...and I learned a great deal about grief from watching Robert grieve for his son.
- **Joann and Jack Emerson** – were family friends who had a son my age and another son my brother’s age. Many, many Sundays after church we went to the Emerson’s to play...usually in the creek...usually getting filthy dirty...usually causing my Dad’s blood pressure to spike. Jack was the Elder assigned to work with me through my confirmation at church. I loved and respected him a great deal...and grieved when he died not long after I was confirmed.

We moved to Roanoke in 1968 in time for me to enter 9th grade at Patrick Henry High School. A whole new set of saints became those people of faith who shaped me.

- **Bob Putnam and Jay Walker** taught our Sunday school class that year. What patient men...who, because of their caring attitude, made Sunday mornings something I looked forward to.
- **Lou Showalter** hired me one summer when I was 16 to work at Nelson Roanoke Corporation, a warehouse job. I would take breaks with the other employees who did their best to do as little as possible...and encouraged me to do the same...which I did. Until Lou called me into his office and said, “I expect more from you.” Wow...that he cared enough about me to push me to be and do better... I’ve never forgotten it.
- **Bob Hutcheson** was my doctor in those days...and someone who took time in his office and every Sunday to see how I was doing. I have enjoyed knowing he grew up in Lexington and was a child of this church. Back in the day when Deb and I were married you had to get a blood test as part of your marriage licensing. Dr. Hutcheson’s office administered our blood tests for us. That evening at a party at his house for us, he arrived late to announce that Deb had passed her test.
- There were so many others who were like Zebedee to me...people whose interest and care and example helped to shape me during those several years I was a part of 2nd Presbyterian.

I’m realizing this sermon could go on for a long time if I name the whole host of Zebedees in my life. There were college and seminary professors and classmates. And there were the members of the churches I have served...so many people who encouraged me, who helped to shape me. And there was and is my wife...that person who knows me better than anyone and who loves me anyway!

And as I look back upon the years I have spent here...there have been and are so many people in this church who have encouraged me...loved me and my family. So, so many names and faces come to mind...but I will refrain from listing them here for fear of embarrassing them or for fear of leaving someone out who did and does mean so much.

3

This morning I have either spoken the names or evoked the names of all sorts of people who have been to me like I have come to think Zebedee was to his two boys. Many of those people were and are church people. Because of their influence and encouragement I was given wings which enabled me to become the person I am. I am so grateful for them and for the manner in which they have lived out their faith in visible, tangible ways. Some of these folks (in fact, many of these folks) are no longer living but their witness is still bearing fruit in my life and who knows how many other lives.

In closing, I want you to be aware that you are among the host of Zebedees to one another...to the children of this church...to the college students who make this their church home away from home...to the person sitting beside you in the pew. You are among that great cloud of witnesses someone will name forty years from now as being instrumental in shaping him or her into a person of faith and integrity.

You are someone's Zebedee whether you realize it or not. So lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race that is set before you. Look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of your faith. Receive the life he can give...and then go become what you have received. To the glory of God. Amen.



Lexington Presbyterian Church
120 South Main Street
Lexington, Virginia 24450
www.lexpres.org