

“The Gift of Letting Go”

Matthew 4:12-23

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From the Pulpit

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O Ever-present and Ever-near God, we pray that You would speak to us now and touch us through Your Word, and through the words that You place on each of our hearts this day. And O dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You, and honor You, and glorify Your Holy Name, In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

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This morning, I’d like to begin by doing something that’s a little *different* for me!

That is, I’d like to share part of *my* call story in response to this familiar call story from Matthew this morning ...

Several years ago – about 18 years ago, as I recall – our family was visiting my brother’s family in Eastern Pennsylvania where most of my family of origin lives (as you may have heard me mention previously).

And, one morning, during our visit, I was up early – long before anyone else – like I usually am, and I was putzing around their kitchen (“Putzing,” by the way, is a Pennsylvania Dutch term, which I haven’t heard too often, out here, in Ohio!)

Anyway, I was making coffee, and doing the few dishes that were left in the sink ... and as I stood there, at the sink, looking out the window, and watching the glorious sunrise that morning, I noticed, for the first time, a small plaque that they had placed on the windowsill just above the sink – which had the following five words – words I’m sure that many of you have also heard before – at different times throughout your lives. It said:

LET GO AND LET GOD!

Now, I had heard this expression countless times before. I’d seen those words written on bookmarks and refrigerator magnets – and as I looked at that plaque that morning, I thought ... *I **already** know what **these** words mean. After all, I am in worship every Sunday. I go to Adult Sunday School each week. I attend Bible study. I **know** what these words mean: **Let go and let God.***

They are words about trust ... about trusting God.

And I was certain – **at that time** – that I already had **all that** figured out ... right up here – in my head.

You see, for me, it was **head knowledge** at that time.

It wasn’t heart knowledge. And it certainly wasn’t experiential knowledge for me at that time, either.

Let go and let God!

Letting go of **my** need to control and, instead, relying on God’s grace and guidance and direction for my life?

Sure, that was what I believed – up here in my head – but it certainly wasn’t what I practiced – consistently in my life!

Letting go and letting God.

It was in the years that followed that I entered into a deep, deep time of discernment – as I wrestled with my call to ministry ... and when it was time, in God’s time, I finally enrolled in my first class in seminary when our twins, Malcolm and Henry, the youngest of our five children started preschool (They are now almost 16 years old!).

It was in my ability to *finally* “let go” of all of my worries and concerns and questions and doubts about how I’d be able to squeeze seminary into our already-full life as a family of seven ... that I was *finally* able **let go** and trust – and embrace the **new beginnings** that awaited me.

Let go and let God!

So, **where, exactly** am I going with all of this – on *this* day – when we are reflecting on this well-known story of Matthew’s account about Jesus’ call to his **first** disciples?

Now, this familiar story – which, not surprisingly, is recorded in all four Gospels (in varying versions) – is well known because it marks **the beginning** of a new chapter in the life and ministry of Jesus.

It is **the beginning** of his Galilean ministry ... but that’s not all!

This story is *also significant* because it is our introduction to his first disciples – Peter and Andrew and James and John – as they, too, answer *their* call and **begin their** ministry of discipleship by following and learning and serving alongside Jesus.

This story is *certainly* a story of hope and promise and new life for the people of Galilee – and for us today!

It is, indeed, a story of **new beginnings**.

However, as I was reading and reflecting and studying this very familiar passage again – recently – I noticed something that I hadn't considered ever before ...

And that is – that there are *three times* in this short story, that the Gospel writer of Matthew uses the word, *left*, as in *having left* or leaving:

In verse 13, we read that Jesus *left* his hometown of Nazareth and moved to Capernaum which then became his home base as he carried out his mission.

In verse 20, we learn that Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother, Andrew, immediately *left* their fishing nets in order to follow Jesus.

And then, in verse 22, James and John – who were brothers – *left* their fishing boat *and* their father so that they could begin this new chapter as Jesus' disciples.

In all three of these references, there was “a leaving” or “a letting go” that **had** to happen:

- Jesus **let go** of his hometown identity as a laborer's son from Nazareth.
- Peter, Andrew, James, and John *all* **let go** of their roles and livelihoods as fishers!
- And we also read that it was necessary for James and John to also leave their father in order to become disciples of Jesus.

While our Gospel reading this morning is certainly known for its central themes of *call* and *discipleship* and *new beginnings* – if we look closely, we discover that it is also a story about **leaving** and **letting go** – and trusting God!

And if we look around us now -- and within ourselves -- aren't those the themes -- the very same themes – of our own lives – as well as within our life together as First Church -- today?

There is always a **letting go** – in some form – that has to happen in order to give way to a **new beginning**.

Spiritual director and author, Jean Wise, writes:

*The spiritual practice of letting go is perhaps one of the most **challenging** of spiritual disciplines; one that takes courage to release what is comfortable and known, and to step into faith, not knowing what to expect next.*

I have come to believe – both in my personal life – and, also, in my church life throughout all these years – that the practice of letting go is, indeed, a spiritual discipline which certainly takes a whole lot of **practice and patience and grace!**

And yet, with *letting go* of the disappointments and the hurts and the grudges of our lives often come the gifts of:

spiritual growth, insight, clarity, wisdom, healing, forgiveness ... and new beginnings!

I'd like to close with the following words of blessing from one of my favorite writers, Rev. Jan Richardson, who is also an artist and a Methodist minister:

“A Blessing in the Letting Go”

In the leaving,
in the letting go,
let there be this to hold onto at the last:
the enduring of love,
the persisting of hope,
the remembering of joy,
the offering of gratitude,
the receiving of grace,
and the blessing of peace.

Thanks be to God for the gift of letting go – and for new beginnings!
Amen!

