

Message: Engage

Rev. Billy Graham had just finished a tour of the Florida coast and was taking a limousine to the airport. Having never driven a limo, he asked the chauffeur if he could drive for a while. The chauffeur didn't have much choice, so he got in the back of the limo and Billy took the wheel.

Rev. Graham turned onto I-95 and accelerated to about 90 mph.

WHAM! The blue lights of the State Highway Patrol flashed in his rearview mirror. He pulled over and a trooper came to his window.

When the trooper saw who it was, he said,
“Just a moment, please, I need to call in.”

The trooper radioed in and asked for the chief. He said, “I have a REALLY important person pulled over and I need to know what to do.” The chief replied, “Who is it, not the senator again?”

The trooper said, “No, even more important.”

“It isn't the Governor, is it?” asked the chief.

“No, even more important,” said the trooper.

“It isn't the President, is it?”

“No,” replied the trooper, “even more important.”

“Well, WHO in the WORLD is it?!?” shouted the chief.

The trooper responded: “I don't know for sure but I think it might be Jesus, because his chauffeur is Billy Graham!”¹

We never know how or when people will be watching us, so let's be sure that people know Jesus is a big part of our lives.

When did God first become real to you? People truly know and experience God in many different ways. I know people who say Jesus became real to them through their baptism, confirmation, during a sermon, at a retreat, a Bible study or small group, or during a particular worship service. It might have happened when we were a child, teenager or adult. Everyone who really believes had a first “ah, ha!” moment, when Jesus became real to them.

¹ www.alpha.pdf

Today’s passage from Luke 5:1-11 is about an “ah, ha!” moment. Jesus first became real to Peter in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, in front of a large crowd and his business partners. That’s the narrative we read together earlier. Not only did Peter have that first experience, two brothers – James and John, who were Peter’s partners, did as well.

Everyone who believes in God has a moment when God becomes real to them. Isaiah 6:1-8 records one of those moments. Isaiah has a vision of God on the throne. He was awestruck and humbled by the presence and holiness of God. It made such an impression that when Isaiah heard the Lord’s voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?” He said, “I’m here; send me” (vv7-8).

Those who have an “ah, ha!” moment are “all in” for the rest of their lives. They don’t hold back. They’re in a real relationship – and it shows! Abraham argues with God. Moses tells God to choose someone else. David vents to God about what’s going on. Job laments the hardships of his life. Peter is certainly bold in his interaction with Jesus. And Jesus himself goes to his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying intensely. He asks God, “Is there another way?” Knowing there isn’t, Jesus says, “Your will be done.”

In every case, what happened was life-changing ... and life-giving.

Have you have an “ah, ha!” moment when you experienced God in a life-changing way? It doesn’t have to be a big, dramatic thing. It could be something small and quiet. After all, Elijah experienced God as the still, quiet voice in the storm. Each of us is unique and God loves diversity, so each of us will have our own experience.

Maybe you aren’t there yet. Maybe you still need some convincing that Jesus is worthy of your respect, honor and commitment.

What do you think convinces Simon Peter to leave his fishing business to follow Jesus in “catching people”? It wasn’t the sermon. Sorry, pastor. Jesus was the first to preach from a boat off the shore of a natural amphitheater. I’m sure the message was good, but it’s what Jesus DID that made the difference. Jesus engaged with Peter in a real, meaningful way, a way that had special meaning to him.

Jesus, a carpenter by trade, tells Simon, a professional fisherman, where and how to fish. That’s most likely going to be frustrating, not life-changing. After all, how would you like it if Jesus showed up at your workplace and told you how to do your job! Come to think of it, Jesus does show up at your workplace … and home … and school … and commute … and at the store. And Jesus *does* ask us to take a chance, risking public humiliation to act as he tells us.

What made the difference for Simon was simple: he said “yes” to Jesus and they caught fish. It wasn’t about their hard work. It wasn’t about the people watching. It wasn’t about his reputation. It wasn’t even about the wealth the fish represented. Peter’s reluctance to obey Jesus quickly gives way to astonishment that what Jesus asked worked – and amazement at how well it worked. It’s not just that Jesus led them to catch fish after having caught none, but the enormous and miraculous size of the catch. Scholars estimate the boats might have held a couple of tons of fish. One cast of the net at the wrong time of the day and – WHAM – a miraculous catch!

It was an impossible event. Peter’s overwhelmed because he first realizes that Jesus is more than a simple man. Peter has his first “ah, ha!” moment. That’s what the miracle did. Peter, James and John believed. And that honored God.

It all hinges on one thing: Peter says “yes” when Jesus asks him to act. When we say “yes” to an activity, idea, or action, we’re saying “no” to other things, and vice versa. For example, if Esperanza and I agree to go on a date, we’re saying “no” to watching TV at that time or being with other people, and so on.

When we say “yes” Jesus, what are we saying “no” to? I’m sure several things come to mind. For example, sin, evil, going our own way, or having other allegiances. We can’t live a life that’s all about us, when it’s meant to be all about God. We can’t be me-first and God-first at the same time. One CEO says it this way, “If you’re going to show up, SHOW UP!”

Jesus asked Simon to take a risk where people knew him best. Jesus asks the same of us. Then he goes beyond that. Jesus asks Simon

to change his life. Luke gives us a clue. He begins with the name Simon and ends by calling him Peter. And, at the “ah, ha!” moment, it’s Simon Peter. That’s the ONLY place Luke uses that compound name. It highlights the fact that Simon changed – dramatically and for good. Jesus says one more thing that reinforces Peter’s decision, forever.

Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid. From now on, you’ll be catching people” (v15). It’s a clear invitation to live life on a different level. It makes such an impact that Peter, James and John bring the boats to shore and leave them there – fish, nets, boats and all. They walk away from wealth, career and the expectations of their family to follow Jesus. They have a new purpose in life. They’re intentional about it.

The same is true for all of us. Following Jesus requires us to be intentional about engaging in a relationship with Jesus, no matter what’s going on. We can’t be wishy-washy, go half-speed or be afraid. Jesus wants followers who are “all in.” They don’t hold back or shrink away when they’re prompted and asked to get involved in the work of the Spirit. Don’t be afraid. Miraculous things are waiting to happen.

What are we saying “yes” to when we follow Jesus?

Three things immediately come to mind: loving God, loving our neighbor and loving one another. I can’t think of better benefits or a better way to live. We’re free of our old doubts and fears.

Let me ask you a question this morning: What does it look like to “catch people” within a five-mile radius of our church or your home? I think it’s all about engaging in relationships.

Rev. Dr. Junius Dotson, the General Secretary for the Global Board of Discipleship says this: “... the word *engage* is a deliberate contrast to our traditional understanding of outreach. Outreach has traditionally taken two forms. It can be seen as missions. These are traditional helping ministries such as food and clothing drives, neighborhood clean-ups, and food pantries. Some outreach is more evangelistic. This includes activities like going to street festivals and handing out invitations to church, or going to a park to pass out water bottles with the church’s information on it.

Any outreach effort whose goal is simply inviting people to church or only providing ministry “for people” and not “with people” without building relationships is shortsighted. It misses the point of intentional discipleship. Engagement means building authentic, organic, and consistent relationships. Only relationships built this way will lead to intentional discipleship.”²

“When engagement is authentic, organic, and consistent, we create the space necessary for people to share their faith. Engagement isn’t a program, it’s an ethos deeply rooted in the way we embrace intentional discipleship together. This fundamentally changes the way we approach any activity or event.”³ Consider events we do regularly. For example, our Easter egg hunt, student parking, Recharge, and dinners.

How would the nature of those events change if we made sure that our encounter with people who came was organic, authentic, and consistent? It could involve a team of people whose sole responsibility is to simply talk to people and listen to their stories. We can’t make disciples without first being in relationship with people!

A journey of faith starts with single step, an “ah, ha!” moment. In that moment, we realize who Jesus is and know who we are. Peter would say he’s a fisherman when people asked who he was. You might say to people, “I’m a businessman or a businesswoman, a technician or an engineer, a teacher, or in IT” based on your profession.

But what would tell Jesus who you are? It’s up to us whether our encounter with Jesus is a one-time event or an eternal one. Among the crowd, many heard Jesus teach and saw Jesus’ power, but they only saw what happened as amazement. However, a few heard Jesus’ call to follow, to be disciples. They saw God’s higher purpose at work.

What’s our purpose in life, business, and ministry? Being Jesus’ disciple means we intentionally work at “catching people” wherever we are so their lives are changed and they, too, experience the life-giving love of God. **The Lord God said, “Whom shall I send?” And they replied, “I’m here, send me!”**

²Rev Junius Dotson, *Intentional Discipleship Systems*, 34-36

³Ibid

Let us pray ...

O God, thank you for calling us and inviting us to experience “ah, ha” moments that change our lives. Forgive us when our doubt, fear, anxiety or me-first attitude keeps us from recognizing the life-saving grace and love you offer. Lift us up when our heads are down, when we are tired and so focused on the trials and challenges of today that we don’t see your hand stretched out to us. Give us the courage to take a risk, where we live, work and spend our time, and, in so doing, come to know you as our Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Isaiah 6:1-8 (CEB)

In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, the edges of his robe filling the temple. Winged creatures were stationed around him. Each had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two their feet, and with two they flew about. They shouted to each other, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of heavenly forces!
All the earth is filled with God’s glory!”

The doorframe shook at the sound of their shouting, and the house was filled with smoke.

I said, “Mourn for me; I’m ruined! I’m a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. Yet I’ve seen the king, the LORD of heavenly forces!”

Then one of the winged creatures flew to me, holding a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed.”

Then I heard the Lord’s voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?”

I said, “I’m here; send me.”

Luke 5:1-11 (CEB)

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God’s word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, “Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch.”

Simon replied, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.”

So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee’s sons, were Simon’s partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people.” As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.