

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Third Sunday of Easter, April 10, 2016

**Pay Attention When Jesus Calls You**

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Acts 9:1-20 John 21:1-19

M. Craig Barnes<sup>(1)</sup> once wrote, “... *all of the stories of conversion in the Scriptures are also stories of calling. When a life is changed by the grace of God, it is for a purpose --- to participate in God’s ongoing mission in the world. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Moses was taken out of the waters as a baby to grow-up and lead the people through the waters of the Red Sea. David was converted from a shepherd to a king with a heart for the flocks of God. Saul the persecutor of the church became Paul the apostle in a solitary moment when the Lord announced, ‘This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel ...’* (Acts 9:15c, NIV) “

Saul was called and he responded. He paid attention to Jesus although that certainly was not his original intent.

He was almost literally between a rock and a hard place when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was a persecutor of Christians and had gone to the Sanhedrin for authorization to hunt down Christians in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. He got his authorization and headed for Damascus with officers of the Sanhedrin, a kind of police force according to William Barclay. It was a long walk, 140 miles, and Saul had to walk alone ahead of the Sanhedrin police. He couldn’t walk in their midst because Saul was a Pharisee and could not associate with them.

On the way, they walked through Galilee which must have reinforced Saul’s thoughts of Jesus and why Saul was pursuing his followers. As he approached Damascus, a storm came up and Saul was struck down. Jesus spoke to him and he paid attention. He had no choice. One cannot ignore the call of Jesus. Saul, now Paul, “... *who had intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury was led by the hand, blind and helpless .. Up to the moment Paul had been doing what he liked, what he thought best, what his will dictated. From this time forward he would be told what to*

do.”<sup>(2)</sup> The Christian is a person who stops doing what he or she wants to do and instead does what Christ asks.

Our very familiar reading from John 21 is another example of paying attention to what Jesus asks of you.

Our Daily Bread (March 25, 2011) said, “*In verses 1-3 [of John 21], it’s apparent that Peter has reopened his fishing business. Just a few days before, Peter was warming his hands over a charcoal fire when he denied Jesus to save his own skin. So why not go back to fishing?*”

Peter and some of the others had returned to their occupation as fishermen. They had forgotten what Jesus had told them to do. Perhaps they thought it was futile or too difficult when faced with the opposition of the Jewish authorities. We don’t know, but we do know that they went back to fishing and were having no luck.

Jesus appears on the beach and shouts to them where to cast their nets and they get a huge catch. They did not realize that it was Jesus calling to them. Often fishermen would rely on spotters on shore to point out where groups of fish were gathered. It is hard to see the fish from a boat but often they can be seen from shore so someone shouting, “You are putting your nets in the wrong spot. Drop them on the other side of the boat” makes sense, and they were successful, very successful.

Then the disciple that Jesus loved, presumably John, realized that it was Jesus on the shore and shouted out, “*It is the Lord.*” Peter was so excited that he jumped into the water and swam to the shore.

They had paid attention to what Jesus called out to them and were successful, even when they didn’t realize that it was Jesus. Their obedience to Jesus’ call preceded recognition of who he was.

But that was fishing for fish, not fishing for persons --- Jesus’ original charge to the apostles. Peter, the leader of the group, had to be reminded forcefully.

Three times he had failed Jesus and had denied him at the time of his trial. Now he was asked three times, “*Simon son of John, do you love me?*” Peter responds, “*Yes Lord, you know that I love you.*”

Three times Jesus answers by telling Peter to feed his sheep --- reminding Peter to follow Christ and to spread the gospel and build Christ’s church.

Peter was hurt because Jesus repeated his question three times but he got the message. You cannot ignore God's call.

He wasn't struck down on the road in a storm; he was reinstated in Jesus' eyes.

Each of us has been called by Jesus. We are called to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are called to spread God's kingdom on earth. We are called to follow Christ.

How we were called was different for each of us. It may have been something that we really can't identify. Somehow or other we just realized what we should be doing as Christians. It didn't come to us as a lightning bolt or a blinding light --- it just came, perhaps very slowly over a number of years.

It may have come as a sudden conversion experience of being born again after years of not paying much attention to Christ.

For me it was the former for most of my life but then I had a sudden burst when I realized that I was being called into the ministry.

It is different for each of us. Jesus forgives our failures and calls us into His service. Paul and Peter are prime examples. If Jesus sought only perfect people, he wouldn't have anyone to choose from. What is important is that we pay attention and respond, no matter how Jesus calls us.

Albert Schweitzer said<sup>(3)</sup>, *"He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to these men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they will pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is."*

**Amen.**

1. M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as a Minor Poet*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 2009.

2. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. ed., The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

3. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1910. English edition, Macmillan Co., New York, 1961.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011