

Sermon for Sunday, November 22, 1970 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"THE HOPE FOR FINDING YOURSELF"

St. Luke 5:1-11

Text: "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him." St. Luke 5:11

There were four of them--Andrew and Peter, James and John. They were fishermen. Then one day an itinerant preacher came by. By the time he finished talking, they pulled their fishing boats up on the beach. They turned their backs on everything in order to follow him. Why?

Carl Jung, in his book entitled, "The Undiscovered Self", states that the crisis of the 20th century is a crisis of the individual--it is the crisis of finding meaning for life, for making life count, for feeling like a person of worth. And while it is true that you and I live in the most affluent society in the history of the world, still we have a great poverty--it is the poverty of identity. So many of us do not know who we are or where life is going. We are struggling to find some meaning to life that will give it direction and purpose.

A friend of mine who is a professor of pastoral psychology at one of our Presbyterian seminaries, once wrote me, "Carl Rogers and other noted behavioral scientists have convinced me that the psychological understandings of man and the psychotherapeutic ethics which accompany them are claiming the allegiance of a great proportion of the college-educated population inside and outside the churches. Overflow crowds greet Erich Fromm or Carl Rogers wherever they speak these days, and on any and all subjects." Then he concluded, "Their weekend workshops have an evangelistic spirit about them." And why is this? It is because modern man is fighting the most important battle of his life--the battle for self-hood, the battle to discover who and what he is and to find some worth in himself as a person.

Tennessee Williams, author of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", has an introduction to his play entitled, "Person-to-Person." In it he writes, "I once saw a group of little girls on a Mississippi sidewalk, all dolled up in their mothers' and sisters' castoff finery, old raggedy ball gowns and plumed hats and high-heeled slippers, enacting a meeting of ladies in a parlor with a perfect mimicry of polite southern gush and simper. But one child was not satisfied with the attention paid her enraptured performance by the others, they were too involved in their own performances to suit her, so she stretched out her skinny arms and threw back her skinny neck and shrieked to the deaf heavens and her equally oblivious playmates, 'Look at me, look at me, look at me!'" And this is, indeed, the crisis of the 20th century--the crisis of man crying out for self-hood, for recognition, for worth as a person--"look at me, look at me."

There are many threats to self-hood today. For example, with the complexity of modern life, bureaucracy is more and more becoming the dominating force in life. When this happens, persons are treated in terms of masses and averages and statistics and generalities that ignores our self-hood. Part of the rebellion of youth today against the establishment, against institutions, can be

understood only in these terms. George Orwell, in his book, "1984", takes this theme and shows us what can happen to life when government--Big Brother--dominates life. In "1984" Big Brother cannot tolerate individuality and the man who dares to be a self, to be unique, to be a person, must be brain-washed and broken until he conforms.

Another threat to self-hood today is the urbanizing of society. The great sprawling cities of today are depersonalizing. We often do not know our neighbors. We may be attacked or robbed or killed and the faceless crowd pauses to watch in detached curiosity without a hand to reach out in your behalf, a hand that says, "you are a person of worth and I have a concern for you." Identity in the urban areas is more and more found in the group--in what one author has called the "other-directed character." By this he means persons whose character is formed chiefly by the crowd--by the example of his contemporaries and his peers. In this cult of uniformity we begin to clap our hands together and march in step, shout slogans and chant choruses. We react rather than act, becoming as another writer has put it, "record-players rather than musicians." Unfortunately, much of what people take for "being different" is just me-too-ism as they conform to their peer group.

But do you really suppose we are any more threatened today than those four fishermen were in their day? After all, they were only numbers on Rome's census roll. They were only insignificant numbers among a minor people of an unimportant country in the backwaters of the Roman Empire. They, too, were looking for meaning to life. They, too, were looking for something that would give them dignity and purpose.

There is another reason that there is a crisis for us today. It is because too often we have nothing which we are willing to live for or to die for. For example, what are you living for this morning? Is there some great vision that dominates your life? Is there some great and grand goal on which you have set your sights? What is the dream into whose realization you are pouring your energies, your years, the resources of your life? Is your life being spent in the best possible way? Or again, what is there that you are willing to die for? For what or for whom would you lay down your life this morning? There was a time when Americans could say, "Give me liberty or give me death... or... my only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country." But today thousands flee the country to Canada or other lands because they are not willing to run the risk of death for whatever our cause or goals might be in Vietnam. No, there are not very many things for which very many of us are willing to die.

This was also true for those four fishermen that ancient day. There was not much to live for--to spend life for--and there was not much they were willing to die for. And there was to come a time--a time when he still wasn't very sure that Peter would deny Jesus and curse and swear that he never knew him, because he wasn't sure yet he had found something he was willing to die for.

But just the same, something happened that day on the beach. The Bible says that the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God. And do you know

why they wanted to hear the word of God? They wanted to hear because that word was saying to them, "God loves you. God cares about you as a person. You are worth a great deal to God and you are so important to him that he sent his Son to die in your place."

Where are you going to find meaning to your life? Who or what will make you feel worthwhile or give you dignity and purpose? Will it be communism? But communism says that my worth is in terms of what I produce. Will it be capitalism? Capitalism says that I am valued for what I possess. No, God is the only one who values us for ourselves.

Wasn't that what happened to Peter? As Jesus preached he suddenly saw himself as he was and the Bible says "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,'" And Jesus said to Peter that day, "Do not be afraid..." And that is what God says to us. He says, "Don't be afraid. I value you for who and what you are. I love you right where you are and for who and what you are." Peter discovered that he was a person--a person of worth because God loved him just as he was.

And then Jesus said a strange thing to Peter and the others. He said, "henceforth you will be catching men." That is, I will give meaning and purpose to your life. I will give you something to live for and to die for. So the Bible says that they left everything and followed him. Yes, they had something to live for and when the time came in Rome years later Peter asked to be crucified with his head down for he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. He had found something he could die for.

Whoever you are there is hope for finding yourself. But make no mistake about it, the only hope for finding yourself lies in Jesus. Because he loves you and cares for you it means you are a person of worthy. Your life is worthwhile. Your life does count. And if you will follow him--if you will leave everything and follow him, you will find something you can live for and something you can die for. And that is the only hope I have--it is the only hope you have for finding yourself. You see, neither of us will know who we are until we know we are his. If you do not know for sure this morning that you are really his, you have not yet found yourself.