

## TAKE THE LEAP!

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Mayer

February 7, 2021

On my first night at Oberlin College, at the beginning of September 1973, after a long walk familiarizing myself with the campus and the little city of Oberlin, Ohio, I stood under a blinking traffic light in the deserted intersection at the corner of the town square and looked at the absolute flatness of the landscape. In all four directions, straight, flat roads led to the farmland that surrounded us, and on to the horizon. In that moment, I realized with gratitude that I was on my own, far away indeed from my Long Island home. I was thrilled to think of the adventure that awaited me and felt full of trust that it would be a wonderful one. I had never been more excited in my life.

This important memory from my own life came vividly to mind as I reflected on today's Gospel, in which Simon and Andrew, James and John embark obediently upon a whole new life as followers of Jesus. As with all the call stories we have at the beginning of each Gospel, we encounter here a stark example of leaps of faith, taken with no sense at all of what the future held.

I'm willing to give myself a little bit of credit for embracing an element of the unknown as I began my college career. I certainly could not foresee the specifics of what lay before me: people I would meet, professors who would influence me, lifelong friendships I would establish, what vocation I would ultimately discern. But I knew a lot about Oberlin College, and had chosen it carefully. Not so these four disciples, who knew nothing of Jesus' background, only that they had been amazed and stirred by what they experienced when they met him. They were in a position not unlike that of Abram, whose story is the first call narrative we encounter in the Bible, who was asked to leave everything he knew for something unknown. Abram had no part in what was being chosen for him. It was God's choice, and Abram was being asked to trust and obey, sight unseen, a vision of an unimaginable future.

Those in the Jewish community in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine would have recognized something very similar in the call of these four disciples. The text is telling the story of the second part of what is literally the first day of Jesus' ministry, the first part of which we heard in last week's Gospel. The day began with the calling of these first four disciples, first Simon and Andrew, then James and John. They had followed Jesus to Capernaum, where, once the Sabbath began, he began teaching in the synagogue with astounding authority, and then healed a man with an unclean spirit. Then, in this morning's text, they leave the synagogue and go to Simon and Andrew's house, where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. Next, after sundown, the Sabbath now over, the whole city gathers around the door of the house as Jesus cures various diseases and casts out demons. The next morning, Jesus' new companions find him praying in a deserted place. When they tell Jesus that everyone is searching for him, he says let's move on; and they follow him as he leaves to continue his teaching and healing throughout Galilee.

I don't know about you, but if my day began with fishing with my brother as I always did and ended with a mob scene outside my mother-in-law's house as a man I had just met healed illnesses and cast out demons inside, I'm not at all sure I'd feel comfortable leaving with him the very next day. But Simon and Andrew and James and John did just this. Something about this Jesus compelled them to do so, just as something had compelled Abram to step into the unknown long before them.

It is this same Lord that we are called to trust and obey in our own lives. This is the very specific challenge of today's text: to ask, are there decisions and actions that seem important, that present themselves to us regularly, that we have prayed about and think we have discerned clearly, that just seem too far-fetched to pursue? Today's Gospel tells us that the Lord who called Abram, the Lord who burst on the scene as Jesus and called Simon and Andrew and James and John, is a Lord who wants to turn our world upside down. If

we have discerned clearly that the Lord is calling us to do something that requires a leap into the unknown, then we can be sure that the Lord will be faithful to us in it. But a leap into the unknown is just that: we cannot know the specifics of what awaits us. Abram could never have imagined the majesty and magnitude of what would unfold for the people of Israel. And Jesus' disciples could never have imagined that they were placing their trust in One who would die to save the world from sin, rise again, and one day return in glory and great power to usher in a new creation. The Lord's will and purposes are beyond our imagining; we are asked to follow in trust and obedience.

If you are contemplating a leap into the unknown, though—and we in the Sister Parishes are ourselves contemplating a leap into a new unity—remember this: since what the Lord has in store for us is beyond our imagining, then anything we are imagining about making the leap that is frightening us is not what the Lord has in store. In this sense, at least, our fears are unfounded. We can't see what the Lord has in store for us, but it will ultimately be better than anything we can picture.

So: let's not try to imagine what by definition can't be imagined. Let's just drop our nets and follow. Jesus promises us this: we won't be sorry.