

Sermon 2-07-10

Isaiah 6:1-8

Luke 5:1-11

*Sometimes, You've Just Gotta Listen*

As I began thinking about our scripture passages this morning, something from my early days in ministry popped into my mind. When I first began as a student pastor at Riverview UP Church, one of my duties was to work with the kids in their GIGgLe program. It took me all of one week to figure out that I was in way over my head with some of these kids. They used words I had never heard before and would play imaginary games about things I was completely unfamiliar with. They'd talk about a place called Hogwarts; they would decide who was in Gryffindor, who played the Seeker; they'd call me a Muggle; and they were always running away from some guy called Voldemort. For those of you who are familiar with these words then you realize I'm talking about the Harry Potter Series, those novels written by J.K. Rowling. When I first began working with those kids, theirs was a world I was unfamiliar with, and so I determined that I needed to make myself familiar so that I could connect a little better. When I first picked up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, I thought I knew what to expect: a silly children's book that was really a waste of my time. But I found something more.

Now, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the books, Harry lived in the home of his aunt and uncle and cousin, in a cupboard under the stairs. He had no friends, no loving family (his parents died a tragic death), and he never received mail. Yet on one particular day, as his eleventh birthday approached, there was a delightful surprise awaiting Harry in the morning mail.

After being ordered to pick up the mail, Harry was shocked to discover that there was a letter addressed to him from a place called Hogwarts. Noticing this odd moment of elation, his uncle quickly took the mail from him (before Harry could read it) and threw it away. If only he had let Harry open it. You see, over the course of the next few days, the letters kept coming. First they came in groups a few at a time, but soon there were hundreds of letters, all delivered by owls, and all addressed to Harry. The family went to a hotel, and the letters traveled there. Finally, after his uncle could no longer take it, he packed the family up and took them to a deserted island far from any mail delivery. But the call for Harry to attend Hogwarts was too intense, and the final invitation for Harry arrived by the hand of a giant man named Hagrid. The call was relentless, no matter the obstacles placed in its way. The call from the Lord God Almighty is just as relentless as well; but sometimes it can be difficult to hear.

Following his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus traveled to Capernaum and began teaching there. As before, the crowds were amazed by his teachings and they were even more amazed by his healings. First, Jesus cast out an unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue and then he went to Simon Peter's home and began to heal many people there as well. Unlike Nazareth, Jesus was well received by the people of Capernaum; they couldn't get enough of what he had to say. It got so bad that Jesus couldn't go anywhere without attracting attention; crowds of people would press in on him from every side. At one point, Jesus notices Simon Peter, who is alongside one of his boats, cleaning his nets after a long night of fishing. After getting into the boat, Jesus asks Peter to put some distance between himself and the crowd by going out a little ways into the lake; from there Jesus will be able to teach much more effectively.

Only thing is, Luke doesn't inform us of Jesus' teaching; rather he skips to the more important aspects of this story; namely the call of Jesus and the obedience of Simon Peter. Jesus asks Simon Peter to go out a little further in the lake and let down his nets. Keep in mind the fact that Simon Peter and his associates (whom we learn later are James and John) have been fishing all night with nothing to show for it. More than likely, they're tired, anxious to get

some rest, and a little bothered that this teacher is asking them to let down their nets after they've already cleaned them. Despite that, Simon Peter capitulates to Jesus' request, recognizing his role as a teacher by calling him "master." While he doesn't think it's a good idea, nevertheless Simon Peter does what Jesus says. He goes out into deeper water, lets down his nets, and gathers so many fish that his nets begin to tear. Panic sets in; they've caught more fish than they can handle, and the boat begins to sink. I imagine Peter making a face to John and James that conveys a sense of "What do we do now?"

This miraculous event becomes a pivotal moment within the relationship between Jesus and Simon Peter. In response to the magnificent catch, Simon Peter recognizes that there is depth to this man standing in his boat. No one else, save for God would be able to accomplish such a feat. While it is safe to assume that Peter does not fully conceive of Jesus as God, he certainly recognizes that this is a person in whom and through whom God is at work in the world. We can be certain of this by Peter's first words following the catch.

Turning to Jesus, Peter proclaims, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinner." While the people in Nazareth sought to kill Jesus because he broke away from convention and shattered their assumptions, while the people of

Capernaum wanted to keep Jesus to themselves and use his healing powers to cure all the ills within the community, Peter recognizes the depths of this man and the true power that he wields; in meeting Jesus, he sees reflected his own sinfulness and unworthiness. In response to Jesus' gracious invitation and presence in Simon Peter's boat, Peter no longer addresses Jesus as "Master" but now speaks of him as "Lord." But before Peter can muster up any other words, before he can do anything else, Jesus takes note of his fear and amazement, saying, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you're going to do one thing, and one thing only, and that's catching people for the kingdom." And when Simon Peter, and the others reached shore, they left everything—their boats, the sizable amount of fish, their nets, and their livelihood—they left everything to follow Jesus.

Hearing the call of God and listening to his living Word is not always an easy thing. I remember when I was getting near the end of my high school experience. It was April, I was set to graduate in June, and I had my whole life mapped out. I was already enrolled at Point Park Conservatory for Musical Theater, the deposits were made, and all that was left was to finish up some financial paper work so that I would be eligible for work-study. The yellow brick road was paved as far as I was concerned. Except that I didn't finish the

financial paperwork on time. To this day, I don't know why I put it off, I don't remember what excuses I made, all I know is, my dad found out and he wasn't happy; I wasn't even happy with myself. That happened on a Friday.

I remember going out with a friend that night, and I really struggled with what had happened. Did I jeopardize my future? For the whole weekend I had a sense of dread and anxiety. I spent so much time thinking over what had happened, trying to figure out where I made mistakes in my thinking, trying to figure out what I did wrong. And then Sunday came along and my family was over for dinner. Everyone knew what had happened the previous days. I moped around the house going from seat to seat. Finally, my grandmother sat down next to me. While I don't remember her exact words, she basically said, "Maybe going to school for theatre isn't what your supposed to do? Maybe there's something better out there for you?" In that initial moment I was horrified, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. But then I recognized, there in my grandmother's words, the call of God. When I stopped putting up roadblocks and started listening, a whole new world opened up; one where I left behind something I loved to embrace something that was completely unknown. In essence, once Jesus jostled my life a bit I was better prepared to hear his voice.

Sometimes, we've just gotta listen. As hard as that can be for us to wrap our minds around, sometimes we've just got to shut up, and listen for God's living Word as it cuts through the din and the noise that can often make listening for Jesus' call so difficult. The crowds might not always hear, the nations might refuse to obey; even our own ears can be clogged from time to time. We can buy into the power structures of the world, to the ways and the calling of the Wal-Marts, the McDonalds's, and the Wall Streets. We can buy into the emptiness that the structures of sin and death hold out to us because they are enticing and mask as the ways we're supposed to live. Yet over all these things, even our own lives, Jesus Christ stands as Lord; not only reigning over us, but abiding with his people, with those whom he has bound to his living, reigning, active, and present life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even now he calls us over the tumult, calls us to look to him, to remember the depths he has gone to release us from the power of sin and death, to look to his cross, and see reflected therein a love like no other; a love that doesn't let us go but claims us. Listening for God's call can come in a variety ways. Isaiah heard the call while he was in worship. Jeremiah and Simon Peter heard the call while they were at work. Some folks hear the call

when God disrupts their lives and their patterns to reveal a new way.

Sometimes, we've just gotta listen. But how do we do that?

It begins with worship and prayer. That's where our ears become unclogged, prepared for God's Word. But it happens as we're sent out from worship as well. It happens when we read scripture, when we pray, when we turn the television, or the radio or the distractions off and focus on Christ, the center of our lives.

Is God calling you to do something, to make a change, to leave something behind, to embrace a more faithful lifestyle? Remember the words of our Lord, "do not be afraid!" In his arms there is no need to fear, no need to be unsettled, no need to be anxious. Because we are claimed by our Savior and dwell in the richness of his grace, we can shut up, and realize that sometimes we've just gotta listen; leaving our nets behind to embrace the fullness of who God calls us to be. Praise, glory, and honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.