



February 4, 2007

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Luke 5:1-11

“Don’t give up!”

I have a riddle this morning. If you’ve heard it before, please wait and let others see what they can come up with. It’s pretty easy, so don’t give up!

What do Smokey the Bear, Winnie the Pooh and John the Baptist have in common?

Ready for the answer? (Those who’ve heard it—say it with me:)
THE SAME MIDDLE NAME!!

This little riddle illustrates a truth our Scripture from Luke also reveals. Both call us to persevere, to keep trying when the solution escapes us. When the answer comes, it often seems so obvious that we are amazed and tickled.

There’s an old saying, “When the Lord closes a door, he always opens a window.” When we believe this is true, we are enabled to keep trying. We trust there WILL be a way forward, even if we can’t see it right now. We won’t give up, we’ll keep putting one foot in front of the other, even in the darkness when the path is hard to see. The Bible actually reveals this truth over and over again.

Let’s think about our reading from Luke. What examples do we find here regarding not giving up?

First, **JESUS** didn’t give up. He had been preaching and teaching in the synagogue. He’d been healing and helping in many places. Bigger and bigger crowds began to gather and follow him. Then he found himself teaching by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The group of listeners grew and grew—soon people were pushed forward and began pressing on Jesus. He backed up until he was standing nearly in the water.

But, instead of seeing the water behind him as a barrier or danger, Jesus used it as a stepping stone. The soon-to-be-disciples were there with their boats. Jesus stepped into one and asked Simon, the boat's owner, to put out a little way from shore. Simon Peter obliged, and Jesus was able to continue teaching, from his "floating podium", offering his message of love and hope to the people. Jesus didn't give up.

The **FISHERMEN** didn't give up either. Remember, they were not yet Jesus' followers. But they were kind and open to him, willing to follow his leading. They had been fishing all night long and had caught nothing. They were exhausted and depleted. When Jesus had finished teaching and the crowds dispersed, he turned to Simon and asked him to put out into deep water and let down his nets.

So, not only had they been up all night fishing with nothing to show for it, not only had they stopped their work mending their nets to help the rabbi continue teaching the people, now they were asked to go back out onto the water and fish some more!

They mustered up their energy and headed out. They must have already had great respect for Jesus. Peter said, "If YOU say so, we will let down the nets." They did, and the catch was tremendous.

Over several Sundays we have been considering how God's Spirit gives us a new way of seeing. We've learned that maturing in faith means we begin to spot things, miraculous, holy, sacred things, where we never did before. Here it appears Jesus had the eye that could spot what the fishermen did not. In Bible commentator William Barclay's words,

There is no need to think that Jesus CREATED a shoal of fishes for the occasion. In the Sea of Galilee there were phenomenal shoals which covered the sea as if it were solid for as much as an acre. Most likely Jesus' keen eye saw just such a shoal... We need the eye that really sees. Many people saw steam raise the lid of a kettle; only James Watt went on to think of a steam engine. Many people saw an apple fall; only Isaac Newton went on to think out the law of gravity. The world is full of miracles for the eye that sees.

Jesus didn't give up. The fishermen didn't give up. And **SIMON PETER** didn't give up. After the catch of fish, he saw himself next to the power and glory of Jesus and he was ashamed. He FELT his smallness and sinfulness. He fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Leave me. I'm a sinful man."

But Jesus didn't leave him. Not only did he not leave him, he actually invited Peter to come with him. He even told Peter he would be working for him, "catching people" instead of fish. He didn't give up on Peter.

Jesus didn't give up in this short passage, but this is not the only example of his not giving up. He had taught in the synagogue, but soon the door of the synagogue would be barred to him. Not giving up, Jesus made the lakeside, the hillsides and the open road places for preaching, teaching and worship.

The gospel story itself tells us **GOD** never gives up. God had been reaching out to his children for generations, trying to reach them, mold them, shape them, transform them, help them----- with limited success. But God didn't give up. He decided to come to us **AS ONE OF US**—to **SHOW** us his way, and provide what we need to be freed from sin and death.

Jesus, the fishermen, Simon Peter and God himself urge us: Don't give up on your journey through life, as you seek wisdom and the path of the abundant life.

This passage has even more to teach us. Some of our efforts are NOT God's will. Sometimes God calls us **TO GIVE UP** in what we are vainly trying to do. The Bible gives us three guidelines to help us discern God's will.

Don't give up--- **BUT** follow these guidelines as you proceed:

First, involve other people. Turn to them for their ideas, perspectives, wisdom, resources and help. That's how God works, too. God uses our help and resources to accomplish great things. In this instance Jesus' didn't give up as he was almost trampled by the crowd and pressed into the water. He didn't give up, but he **DID** turn to others for help and resources. He turned to the fishermen for their boat and navigation skills.

Second, listen for instructions from God. This is not as hard as it seems. It is true there may be times when we don't feel at all sure where God is leading us. In those cases, it's probably wise to wait and keep listening. Don't make any sudden dramatic moves. But **KEEP LISTENING!** We need to explore ways we can hear God. If we don't experiment with this, we're not going to discover much. If the phone rings and we don't pick it up, we're not likely to hear the voice of the caller, right? So, start listening for ways God rings your phone. Start experimenting with ways to pick it up.

Some folks need silent time alone. Some folks need to be outside in nature. Some folks need to pray with a companion. Some folks find special passages in the Bible

that open their hearts and souls to God's presence. Some folks need to have a heart-to-heart talk with a trusted friend in whose life and spirit they perceive God's presence. So, like the fishermen, we are told, "Don't give up!" But listen for what God is telling you to do.

The third guideline is simple, after listening to God, **DO WHAT HE SAYS!** There may be deep water God is telling you to move into. There may be nets God's telling you to cast. The fishermen followed God's instructions and the catch was tremendous. But you have to be willing to try. We have to be willing to make an effort. Give your energy, even when you are tired like the fishermen after a long night of fruitless work. Give your time, your skills. And be willing to try, even when it seems odd, strange or even hopeless. Peter's story here tells us not to give up on **OURSELVES** as hopeless, no matter how many mistakes or sins have been a part of our lives.

Finally, one essential check must be made: Is this endeavor **ROOTED IN LOVE?** All we do needs to be rooted in the love of God made known in Christ. When we think of the old saying, "God never closes a door without opening a window," keep this in mind. If your goal is to get rich, for example, I'm not sure this holds true. I'm not sure that God will keep opening a window for you to get rich. But God will **ALWAYS** be opening windows for us to find ways for love to be shared. There will never be a barred door or boarded up windows when we seek to live in love.

It's interesting what a short paragraph from Luke's gospel can teach us.

Don't give up.

Be sure to involve other people in what you are attempting.

Listen for God's instructions.

Be willing to put forth an effort as you do what God says.

Make sure that what you are attempting is rooted in love.

Brothers and sisters, never give up on believing there is a God who loves you.

Don't give up on discovering what a gift you are—sent by God to this world.

Don't give up on sharing that good news with others. God is guiding us. **NEVER** give up on God's good news of the triumph of love over death and sin. **AMEN!!**

(Invite people to complete the **SERMON QUIZ**- especially the final question: What endeavor you think God might be asking you to undertake?)