

In the movie *Good Will Hunting*, Robin Williams plays Sean, a middle-aged counselor/therapist who works with a twenty-something genius named Will. Will, played by Matt Damon, is struggling to figure it all out. It seems Will is seeking permission to pursue his life's calling: love, and career fulfillment, and challenging adventure.

The story centers around the conversations between Sean and Will, and the friendship that eventually emerges.

Like Will, Sean is also grieving. He's a widower, who in losing his wife, seems to have also lost his sense of purpose, and balance, and centeredness. She was his sun, and moon, and stars. But Sean's character talks about how the meeting of his wife changed his entire existence. There was something about her presence, and about her connection that superseded every other priority.

Sean shares with Will that he gave away his ticket – that's right a ticket to the famous Yankees/Red Sox game with Carlton Fisk's heroics – because he had to “go see about a girl.” At the conclusion of the movie, Will leaves a note for his friends. He too, must “go see about a girl.” He's off to California to pursue love, and ultimately, the happiness and belonging he both desires and deserves.

It's certainly true that both Will and Sean act with a sense of immediacy in pursuing love. They drop what they believe they are rooted to, in the hopes, perhaps even the certainty, of finding something more lasting and truer. Once they know, they go!

But it's also true that this movie has a runtime of 126 minutes. There are lots of back stories, and process, and internal discernment for both

Will and Sean before they seek other seas, or head down to the lakeshore.

And that brings me to today's text. Jesus says to his first four disciples, "Hey come with me, and I'll help you fish for people." And immediately, they leave their nets, and they leave their boats, and they leave their Daddies. And they follow Jesus. The disciples are all in. It seems they've got to go see about a fish. Or lots of fish. Or people.

I've preached on this passage before, and heard lots of other people preach on it, too. And we always seem to get hung up on the immediacy. We always tend to assume that the four disciples dropped every single responsibility and accountability in that very moment, and took off. That's not the angle or the approach I want to follow today.

Please don't get me wrong, I do not doubt the possibilities of what God can do. God's vastness is easily undercut if it's only as big as our limited imaginations. So yes, I believe that there can be powerful, galvanizing moments that reorient and repurpose our lives in immediate ways. Yes, we can have Damascus Road moments. But...but, but, but...Not every calling is immediate, nor climactic, nor even memorable. Please remember that immediacy, and high drama, and memorability do not a calling ensure. But rather, it is the attunement of heart, mind, soul, and spirit to pursue lasting purpose. Sometimes it's fast. Sometimes it's not!

Remember also that our gospels are short. Very short. These are stories, meant to be told quickly, and with a sense of urgency, that will generate impact. They are the ancient precursors of YouTube and TikTok. And how would you like to convey the meaning of Jesus' life in a three-minute video or a six-second short? You'd be a little light on details, too.

What do I mean by this? Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness, recapped in less than eleven verses. Jesus lived on this earth for 30-plus years. Mark and John don't even mention his birth, or what his life was like before his formal calling to ministry. Therefore, Matthew isn't gonna devote much time to the transition period of the disciples. We simply know that something has changed and provoked them, and they've got to find out what it is.

A few words to remember. Nets. Boats. Daddies. The text is quick, but it's also efficiently thorough.

Peter and Andrew drop their nets, and John and James abandon the nets they are mending. They live in a world where their value is assigned to their skill, or their trade. Herod's got his hatcheries, and he's got his Temple machine. And these nets are how the future disciples carve out an existence.

Can you picture them, calloused hands and bent backs, resentfully, but dutifully plodding through their work? They even seek to mend things that needn't be mended, that cannot harness what they really need to be truly fulfilled.

And surely, well before they met Jesus, there had to have been some longing for a life of vocation, something beyond this stubborn trade. Right? Surely, they wanted more, even if only subconsciously, but had never seen any avenue or escape from this wheel of certainty and monotony.

James and John leave their boat. If they were modern farmers, they'd be leaving their horses or their tractors; if they were modern tradesmen their pickup trucks. Their boats travel. And they gather.

Their boats make batch-work possible. They aren't much, but they do float, and they keep their families afloat financially. But surely, long before they met Jesus, the disciples would have felt tethered to their boats, both emotionally and economically, right?

James and John leave their Daddy. We don't see it as often anymore, but many businesses used to include the name "and Son(s)." In First-Century Palestine, every business was a family one. Land and wealth could only pass from father to son. It's certainly not a new story to hear of children who believe they can love their parents, while also not necessarily wanting to be dependent upon them, nor follow in their exact career path. Surely, at some point, the disciples must have thought, "I love my Daddy, and I love my family, but is fishing the only way I can express love for them and support them?"

The story, to be effective for the listener, needs the responses of the disciples to be immediate, dramatic, and decisive. Jesus asks them to follow, and they do. And the story, written and told in an age of marginalization and looming danger, asks the listener to respond to Jesus's calling with a similar sense of intention and urgency.

As you process this story, I would urge you to think less about the how and when of the disciples following Jesus, and more about the why and what. In that very moment, the disciples determined to be curious and intentional about pursuing a life beyond what they already knew. In that very moment they started seeking out God's kinship rather than settling for Herod's kingship.

I would also argue that in the narrative telling of the gospels, the disciples have a quick period of discernment, and an even quicker and even more radical and urgent response to their calling. But in reality, I

believe their discernment was more prolonged, and their response choppy and clunkier. Because life is messy.

I think about John Wesley's experience at Aldersgate. One night, his heart was strangely warmed in the company of fellow worshipers, and it's that feeling that gave him a sense of assurance. History reports upon a single moment, but we must scan its footnotes to recall the thirteen plus years of methodical discernment that preceded Wesley's moment of assurance.

The disciples decided to pursue a different kind of fishing. Whatever and however it looked like or expressed itself, their determination was finally resolute. They'd spend the rest of their lives working to live out a more graceful and fluid expression of calling. And don't we all?!?

Each one of us here today represents people who are seeking to live out our sense of divine calling. We are discerning what that means for us as individuals, and what that means as a congregation.

I believe the invitation Jesus gave the disciples, and us as well, is an invitation to be curious and open to God's possibilities. And I believe that starts and ends with our genuine curiosity about our neighbors, and our openness to how the sharing and receiving of gifts with and from them can transform our world.

Here's a question we can ask: What are we rooted to in our present lives that prevents us from pursuing a future full of brighter, more compassionate, more just possibilities?

I also believe it's important to note that the desire for and coming about of transformation will happen at different paces depending on every person and space.

Are we willing to engage in conversations with someone new? There might be a connection that develops instantaneously. Conversely, there might be so many differences that each person in the relationship must make the intentional decision to work for common ground. The hard-won empathy and understanding of each person might eventually create a respect and friendship that surpasses what we thought possible. But if we stay in the boat, we might never find out.

And is not the same thing true for the missional endeavors we pursue, or the kinds of worship we express, or the programming we implement, or the healing remedies we share? Some will provide immediate results. Others will require time, patience, and hard work to manifest themselves in meaningful ways. It is not the immediacy, the drama, or the memorability of these endeavors that matters. It is their impact upon our hearts and minds. And it is our decision to pursue them with authenticity. The timing will be what the timing will be, because this isn't a contest.

Jesus is calling. And we need to go see about some people. Sometimes that seeing will be quick and easy. Sometimes it'll be a bit more laborious, or messy, or even awkward, but perhaps no less rewarding.

We're not called to stay rooted to nets, and boats, and Daddies. We're called to work for a world rooted in God. And we can only do that by seeing about those around us. It seems like today's as good as any to starting seeing. May it be so! Amen.