

## 10-8-17 – “Fishers of People: God Asks for Our Talents” – Matthew 4:18-22

Sometimes, we can be swimming in a sea of talents, and we don't even know it.

I was reminded of this just last weekend, when we had our Fall Arts Festival here at the church. Some of you have told me that you are painters, or photographers. I've seen a few pictures or websites showcasing your work. But walking into that room last Saturday and literally being surrounded by the artistic talents of people in this congregation – that was overwhelming and absolutely incredible. As I stood in there and looked around, I was deeply aware that God has abundantly poured out so many different gifts and skills – so many talents – on this particular group of disciples.

And of course, when I say ‘talents’, I'm not just talking about artistic talent, or musical talent, or the things you might see featured in a “talent show”. Some of you knows the ins and outs of plumbing, or construction; others of you can cook and bake; some of you can turn HTML script into a website; others of you can create order out of chaotic schedules or storage units. You are lawyers and social workers and teachers and administrators; you care for children and for the elderly. You build and teach and create and analyze; you work with numbers, and with people, and with own your hands. You feed and you clothe and you extend hospitality – Friends, we are swimming in a sea of talents!

Now, humility is a Christian virtue, and it's an important one, modeled after the life and ministry of Jesus himself. But I think sometimes we misinterpret what it means to be humble, and we get uncomfortable acknowledging our gifts and talents, or we write them off as “not *that* good.” When someone praises us, or gives us a compliment...we start to squirm a little. Maybe we undermine the compliment with a joke, make light of our talents, self-deprecate...you know the drill.

But our faith says that God created us and called us good. And we have been equipped with some incredible talents, gifts that God has given us for a reason.

So, I want to try a little experiment. I want you to take a minute and think about your own skills and talents. What talents do you use every day in your ordinary routine, so often you might take them for granted?

What are some talents that you *have*, but you don't use as often? Talents that might be a little bit more hidden, something people wouldn't know about you if you didn't tell them.

I'm going to give you a minute to turn to your neighbor and share some of your talents with one another. I want you to share your name, share one talent, one thing you're really good at, that you use all the time, and one talent that isn't so obvious, or people may not know. For example: “I'm Ginna. One talent of mine that people know is that I'm good at public speaking. And a talent of mine that most people don't know is that I'm actually quite good at high level math. I stopped taking math courses in college because I didn't have a huge passion for it, but I went all the way through calculus in high school, and I aced 'em all.

Those of you who were here last Sunday will remember that we have begun our Stewardship Season here at First Presbyterian Church. Last week we talked about money – our “treasure” – because money is a big and important part of stewardship. But money is not the only resource that God gives us, and it's not the only gift we can give back to God. We give God our treasure, yes, but we also return to God our time, and our talents.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus goes looking for his first disciples, and he finds and calls four fishermen. If that choice strikes you as somewhat strange, you're not alone. Biblical scholars through the centuries have wondered what it means that Jesus calls fishermen to

be his disciples. Don't get me wrong: it was an incredibly common and important profession in Jesus' time and place. But these fishermen...they are the people Jesus chooses to establish the church: to preach, and teach, and prophesy, and evangelize, and spread the good news that the Kingdom of God has come to earth. And when we look at it...a fisherman and a preacher; a fisherman and a church builder – they're both vitally important, but they seem like pretty different skills sets, don't they?

Unless. Unless there's a lesson in the story that we may not hear the first time around. Jesus calls four disciples whose profession is fishing. And he says, "Good. You know how to fish. From now on, you will fish for people."

Jesus asks his disciples to leave a lot behind when he calls them to follow him – family, safety, security – but he doesn't ask them to leave behind their identity. He doesn't ask them to forsake their gifts and talents. Instead, he says, "Bring your talents along; and I will put them to use for the sake of God's Kingdom." As Professor Tom Long puts it, "All four of these disciples leave their fishing nets, but they do not stop fishing...Their past has not been obliterated; it has been *transformed* by Jesus' call to follow."

What might it look like for us, to allow *our* skills and talents to be transformed for the work of discipleship? What does that transformation look like for a lawyer, a mechanic, a teacher, an accountant, a woodworker? Where is the Holy Spirit already working through us, in the work we do and the lives we live each and every day? What gifts do we offer to the world and to one another that we consider mundane and ordinary, but in which God sees the power to do the extraordinary?

When I think about stewardship of our talents – about letting God claim and transform our skills and professions for God's own use – I think of my friend Melissa. Melissa is a lawyer, an immigration lawyer. And she uses her skills, training, and education to help immigrants living in the United States find pathways to citizenship. She lends her knowledge and expertise as she consults with non-profit and advocacy organizations working to keep families together and defend human rights. Melissa's talent is a mind that understands the law. And she uses it to look out for the safety, security, and basic human rights of others. God takes Melissa's talents and transforms them for the Kingdom.

When I think about stewardship of our talents, I think of Valorie and the back-to-school event that she and Mark hosted a few months ago. One of Valorie's talents is her ability to cut, color, and style hair. And hearing God's call, seeing the needs of the children in Taos, she opened up her shop for one day at the end of the summer to give free back-to-school haircuts to any children that wanted them. I've been told that Valorie gave more than a hundred haircuts that day. And that Mark, too, bought and collected school supplies to give away to the kids who needed them. God took Valorie and Mark's talents and transformed them for the Kingdom.

When I think about stewardship of our talents, I think about Wolfgang getting involved with Living Waters for the World in Guatemala. Among Wolfgang's many talents are his skills as a plumber. He uses that talent to help people here in Taos every day. But the Holy Spirit tugged on Wolfgang's heart and imagination a little differently one day, and he felt a calling to help bring water to communities that didn't have clean, running water. Wolfgang listened to this call, and so he began to look for funding and taking the first steps on a journey that would take him to Guatemala time and time again, and bring clean water to hundreds – or thousands? – of people. God is taking Wolfgang's talents and transforming them for the Kingdom.

When I think about stewardship of talents, I think about those of you who have led careers as teachers and now tutor, or read to children, or volunteer at local schools. I think about

those of you whose professions involve physical, manual labor and who are always willing to help out at the church, or at Camp Loma Verde, or when another member of our community needs a hand. I think of all the times and places when there is a need, and you step up and say, “Here am I, Lord, Send me.”

Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls four fishermen. Immediately they leave behind their nets and follow him. Ordinary talents transformed into something extraordinary through the simple call of Jesus.

Friends, where in your life might God be calling to you? What might it look like – for you – to offer up your gifts and talents for the work of discipleship, of building God’s Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven”? What unique skills do you bring to the table of grace that you can use to build up the whole Body of Christ?

They need not be glamorous, these talents we offer. All it takes to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary are a few words from the mouth of Jesus, “Come. Follow me.”

So friends, let us come, and meet Jesus at that lakeshore, our unique gifts and talents in tow. Let us come, for God is calling, and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.