

So when Jesus heard that John, his cousin, and one of his best friends, got arrested, Jesus retreated to Galilee.

Now, that word “retreat” is a little bit misleading.

To retreat somewhere sounds like you are escaping, leaving, or perhaps running away to be by yourself.

But when Jesus retreated to Galilee and specifically to the town of Capernum, he was headed straight for the lion’s den.

There are two reasons for this.

First of all, as the text said, it was called “Galilee of the Gentiles” for a reason.

Jesus had entered hostile territory, in part, because it was filled with almost all Gentiles and was run by the Roman Empire.

But Galilee was even more hostile because of the specific person in charge.

You see, Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and he was the man who had John arrested.

So, no, Jesus didn’t retreat anywhere.

Jesus goes directly to the source, to the man responsible for arresting his cousin and good friend, that’s where he goes to find his disciples.

I can only imagine that Jesus was, and I ask you to forgive my language, pissed off.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, he has just come to Galilee from the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan, and of course, resisted all of Satan's temptations.

You'd imagine that he might be feeling weak or worn down, but not Jesus.

Perhaps he's feeling emboldened.

This is the very beginning of his ministry, as he is about to call his very first disciples.

Maybe John's arrest is what helped him really see the corrupt Roman Empire for what it was, and it motivated him to really get his ministry off the ground.

He was living in an empire in which some 70-90 percent of the population experienced varying degrees of poverty -- from the very poorest to those who temporarily fell below subsistence levels.

Understandings of hygiene were limited; social stresses were high; water quality was poor, food insecurity was rife with low quality and limited quantities.

Such factors resulted in widespread diseases associated with poor nutrition (blindness; muscle weakness etc.) and a lack of immunity (diarrhea; cholera etc.).

These kinds of diseases were death-bringing in a world that required physical labor for survival.

This is the reality he lived in and he must have always known that it was corrupt, but perhaps that was conceptual.

Now they've arrested someone very close to him, now it's personal.

Now he's driven, committed to stand up to the power structures as they are.

Now begins the movement in which he will not only call disciples, but preach the Sermon on the Mount, begin his ministry of healing, and teach what it means to be a devoted, faithful, Jew who follows God's teachings.

He knew it wouldn't be easy, and he knew he couldn't go it alone, which is why, in this passage, he begins by asking Peter and Andrew to follow him, and then he goes on to ask James and his brother John (different from John the Baptist).

Those first disciples, for their part, might have preferred to keep their jobs, to remain with their families, to stay with the life that they knew.

But when they see Jesus and hear his words to them, they make a different choice, they take a risk, step out in faith, leave behind that which is comfortable and secure.

They choose to follow Jesus.

I imagine they made this risky choice because they too knew what it meant to live under the rule of the Roman Empire, because they knew in their hearts that it wasn't right, that it had to change, that the social and political climate was untenable.

Now, Jesus seems motivated perhaps out of rage, or as I call it, righteous anger, because of John's arrest, coupled with his faith in God and belief that a different world was possible.

But I wondered, why did he call fishermen?

Why did he think they would work with him?

What would motivate them?

Turns out that fishermen had pretty miserable existences under the Roman Empire, so maybe they had nothing to lose or were so angry from being oppressed, that he knew they'd make the necessary sacrifices to follow him.

Either way, in doing my research, I found that in ranking occupations in the Roman Empire, owners of cultivated land were first and fishermen were last.

That goes to show you where they were in the pecking order.

Athenaeus, in his writings, indicated that fishermen and fishmongers were on par with money lenders and were socially despised as greedy thieves (*Deipnosophistai*, 6.224b-28c).

Not only that, but fishing was controlled by the "powers that be."

You see, commercial fishermen like Peter, Andrew, James and John worked for the royal family or wealthy landowners who contracted with them to provide a certain amount of fish by a certain time.

They were paid either with cash or with some of their own fish.

And, not only that, but fishermen leased their fishing rights from persons called "toll collectors," for a percentage of the catch.

The "tax" could be as much as 40% of their catch. (Malina & Rohrbach, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 44).

*"Thus, Jesus calling fishermen is more than just calling them away from their families.*

*It also involves a break from the "powers that be" -- the wealthy and or the government -- and into a new power: the reign of heaven."* ("You Gotta Serve Somebody," Onemansweb.org).

So, we can assume that the fishermen were motivated by their personal, political and economic circumstances to follow Jesus in an impassioned were-going-to-change-the-system kind of way, and Jesus added the because-we-are-committed-to-God, component.

Being in those circumstances, I imagine it could have easily felt like God had forgotten them, but Jesus reminded them that God had not, that God faithfully abided with them,

that they needed to work together and recommit themselves, along with other faithful, ones to creating God's realm on earth.

But I wonder if we haven't become complacent in our comfort.

For those of us who have comfortable jobs, homes and lives, those of us who aren't abused by our employers or the government, are we too comfortable with the status quo, with the way things are?

There are people among us and in our communities who are afraid that their civil liberties will be taken away,

who are afraid their healthcare will be taken away,

who are afraid that themselves or their loved ones will be deported,

who are afraid for their family because they are having trouble making ends meet in this ever-increasingly-expensive economy,

who are afraid that they might lose their job because it will become automated.

There are so, so many reasons for people to be afraid, and yet we, as a people of faith have been called to such a time as this.

Jesus did not run away from the source when his beloved, John, was arrested.

He did not stick his head in the sand, he didn't say, "oh well, the government is too powerful, I can't make any sort of difference."

No, the needs of the people flashed before his eyes and he went to the source of the corruption.

And at that source, he started organizing people.

He went on the shoreline and said, “You, come, and you, come, and you, drop your nets, I need you, come with me.”

I know that we don't like the idea of evangelizing and telling people to come to church, and I am not asking you to do that.

What I am asking you to do is to think about something.

Each of those people (unfortunately only men were named, but I bet he called women too) changed their lives drastically when they decided to follow Jesus.

Now, what I'd like you to think about, is, how would your life be different if you were not a Christian, if you did not follow Jesus?

You might have an extra hour to yourself on Sundays, but besides that. How would your life be different?

If you can't think of anything, then I invite you to think about how you can change your life, to be a more committed disciple.

Now is not the time to be complacent in our comfort but to know that God is calling each of us and it is our individual and collective responsibility to answer the call.

What needs to change in your life so that you have the courage to drown out your fear and live the faithful life that God is calling you into?

Or, as the saying goes, “Your career is what you are paid for, and your calling is what you are made for.”

Are you doing what you are made for? If not, what's gotta give?