

Matthew 4:12-23
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Faith in Uncertainty

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12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15 "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." 17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. 23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Last September Claudia and I did the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Course at the U. Mindfulness Based **Stress** Reduction. How prescient was that?

I recommend the 8-week course. And I want to share the simplest, most profound lesson I have taken from it. Shorthand, it's A,B,C. A=become Aware that you are stressed. B=Breathe, deeply, repeatedly to come fully into the present moment. Then, C=Choose whether and how to respond.

It is astonishingly effective and affective. You may be in a very peaceful state this morning and not in need of such a remedy. I offer it as a useful thing to have in your toolbox when stress inevitably comes.

Let's practice the breath—together.

Anne LaMottt, the present-day prophet, says that the opposite of faith isn't doubt. It's certainty.

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That means that faith and **uncertainty** go hand in hand.

In this time of political uncertainty, I am grateful for the faith we share in God's unconditional love for all people and for all of creation.

As your Rector, let me be clear about what that means for us:

-With faith in God, we will continue to pray sincerely, fervently, for the President of the United States and for all in authority.

-And, **true to our faith**, St. John's will remain: a safe place-- a sanctuary for the vulnerable; a voice for justice; and a center for thoughtful, non-violent response in keeping with the gospel call to love our neighbor.

Uncertainty does help clarify where our faith lies, including the kinds of faith that undergird action: faith in our constitutional democracy and in the rule of law, for instance; faith in one another and in ourselves, in our ability to stand up for our values.

Faith and hope are inextricably bound for me.

Where do you find hope?

Seek and ye shall find.

In the emotional rollercoaster of the last two months, I've been seeking signs of hope. And I've found them.

I find hope: in scripture; in the history of faith, in songs and writings like those we had in last week's MLK celebration; and in the stories of real people, including some whom I know.

Today's scripture shows that in the darkest of times, the gospel writers also found faith and hope in the stories of real people. Matthew was written in the late in the first century. Roman troops had destroyed the Temple, the very home of God, and razed the holy city of Jerusalem. A few years before that cataclysm, Nero had persecuted and killed Christians (including Peter, maybe Paul), blaming them for the fire in Rome in the year 64.

Matthew's community boldly kept the faith in the midst of uncertainty and danger. They proclaimed that Jesus was God's promised Messiah, the fulfillment of Hebrew prophesy, the

light in their darkness. They took heart from the lives of the disciples--whom some of them may have personally known. Real, flesh-and-blood people like Peter, who went from the shame of denying Jesus to the strength of leading the nascent church in Rome.

Peter had answered Jesus' call by "leaving his nets". Matthew's community knew what a radical, sacrificial decision that was. The fisherman's nets symbolized his world. Following Jesus, Peter and the others gave it all up: their profession, identity, honor, the life-time of knowledge and skill by which they fed their families.

They stepped away from everything that was familiar and secure, everything on which their survival was based, into an uncertain future.

Jesus called them to repent: to turn around, to change direction. And they did so in a moment of decision.

Repentance, change can come in a moment of decision, as it did for them. In ways large or small, we may feel called to change, to step out, to do something new. Leading up to the Women's March yesterday, for instance, I heard so many say that it was the first time they had stepped out and that they were going because they simply knew that they "had to". I felt I had to make my own statement, too; I carried a sign that read 'Climate Change is REAL!'

What starts as a one-time action may be just that. Or it may change our lives.

Sometimes life-change comes gradually. It creeps up, as it did on me. Again quoting Anne LaMott, "God is sneaky".

When I came back to faith twenty years ago I had no plan, no direction: I just knew I needed what I had stumbled upon. Having spent years in a faithless desert, I drank deeply from the well of weekly worship. At first, that was all I wanted. Then, slowly, I found my way into the community of faith, the Body of Christ.

Christian community became the wellspring of my faith and my hope. It still is, today.

Community has always been the center of Christian faith. Jesus' first act was to create a community of disciples. Like them, we break bread together, we worship God together, we share our stories, we join together, with complementary gifts, to serve others.

Together we grow in strength and courage. The root for 'courage' is the Latin "cor," meaning "heart". Like the word itself, the feeling of courage, of encouragement, is rooted in the heart.

Here and now, the lives of real people I know encourage me. They give me hope.

One is The Rev. Dr. Alika Galloway, whom some of you have met. She'll be our Forum speaker on Feb. 5. Alika is the co-pastor (with her husband Ralph) of our Northside partner parish, Kwanzaa. Laughingly she told me how **long** she resisted that call. Leaving the familiarity and comfort of academe, stepping into uncertainty, she became a parish leader.

From the outset, she and Ralph staked out their ground with the marginalized--with the LGBT community, for instance, a rarity in the African American church. They founded a healing ministry in the Broadway neighborhood for women and girls forced by poverty into prostitution. Their Middle School after-school program focuses on "the least" as well: the children whose own poverty threatens their future. They do all of this out of a congregation smaller than ours.

Alika is a model of courage, strength and hope. She is exactly the kind of person that civil rights elder Vincent Harding told Krista Tippett is so very needed: one who "will stand in that darkness, will not run away from those deeply hurt communities and will open up possibilities that...people can't see...except through the human beings who care about them".

I thank God for bringing our congregations together to join in holy action, grounded in relationships of mutual respect, faith, and love.

In closing, being your Rector gives me enormous hope. It comes daily from the joy of working with a faithful, creative, devoted staff.

And it comes from serving with you.

When I was growing up, church membership and attendance were expectations. Now, they are not even on the radar!

Your presence says you have made a choice--in fact, a whole series of choices:

to be here when there are so many other options;

to serve;

to open yourself to God's love through song and prayer;

to open your heart with and in community;

to continue to grow spiritually, responding to God's evolving call with all of the uncertainty that is just part of the deal.

Thank you.

So, now, moving forward in faith, let us take another deep, mindful breath together.

Amen