

All Night Evangelism

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Luke 5:1-11

"...we have worked all night long but have caught nothing."

Movement 1 – Running in Circles

Have you been stuck in the same old same old? Have you ever been stuck doing the same thing again and again? Have you been caught in the routine, in the machine, in the ritual that leads to the banal and the mundane? Have you been stuck in the same old same old?

Maybe you have a dog that likes to dig in the same spot in your yard, and every morning you go outside with your shovel, cursing at the dog, and fill in the hole. The next morning you find the same thing again, and you find yourself cleaning up the same mess again and again. No matter how hard to try to keep things clean, you keep finding the same hole and the same mess of dirt again and again.

Maybe you are given a pile of papers to go through with a meticulous eye for the minute detail, and no matter how quickly you go through the papers, the in-pile seems to keep on climbing and climbing, and it seems to have no end.

Maybe you have a teacher or a professor who only offers one lecture again and again, making the same point again and again, and you have realized that you could give the lectures for the professor, since you have heard it so many times.

Maybe you have found yourself stuck, like a dog chasing its tale, working hard to get out of the cycle, but only finding yourself falling deeper and deeper into the routine and the repetition.

I wonder if the disciples felt this way before they encountered Jesus; Peter, James and John, the fishermen. They were fishermen by trade, a profession that we may assume have some sense of adventure, considering the changes in weather, the type of fish, and those who you might work with. Yet I am sure that Peter, James and John found the profession routine. I am sure that after years of casting out their nets, Peter James and John knew how to tie knots in their sleep, knew how to pull in nets with their eyes closed, and knew where to steer the ship without use of a compass or a chart. I am sure that the profession of fishing was for Peter James and John routine. It was the same old same old. Just last night, the disciples were involved in this repetition and routine, casting their nets into the sea again and again, and finding themselves only to come up empty-handed. I wonder if they felt stuck in the routine; I imagine they were stuck in a routine.

There is a Monty Python sketch where a mild manner man finishes his breakfast and leaves his house to go to work. The sketch goes through great pains to show how on the way to work, "nothing happens!" No person was found hiding behind the bushes, no piece of evidence implicating a scandal and complex web of relationships pulling him to the middle of a government plot was found, no woman waiting to seduce him was hiding next to his car, no run-away animal in front of him threatening his life, no alien abduction, nothing. And the skit continues to portray a mild mannered person who goes to his office to find "nothing!" No instructions from the government, gunshots, etc. This is a skit about a mild-mannered man who is living in a routine and finds little to no excitement in that routine.

Routines can be good, they can keep us accountable, they help us to discipline and schedule our time, but they can also lead to the mundane and the boring. The writer D.H. Lawrence wrote in one of his books that it is, "...better [to] die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions." The routine can become boring and mundane. Think about the life of the church. Many churches are stuck in a routine with their festivals, their celebrations, their worship services, their meetings and the overall life cycle of the congregation. Many churches find themselves trying the same old program again and again, and reaching nothing new and nothing exciting. The routine leads to boredom and a tepid kind of complacency. Do you know what I am

talking about? Have you ever been stuck in the same old same old? Have you ever found your routines leading to redundancy and pointing towards emptiness? Have you ever been stuck in the routine?

Movement 2 - The Empty Pursuit in Life

The routine and the redundancy may point to a deeper longing and desire. The routine may dig at something deeper, a gnawing at your experience. The rut of the routine can rot your spirit, your sense of life, your very being. The routine may point to a deeper longing and desire.

In the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, Jonathan, the main character, yearns to fly, and to soar with grace and beauty. Yet to please his parents and the expectation of the flock, he decided to give up his desire to fly well and beautifully and return to the mundane life of the average seagull; fighting for food, and flying only to obtain food, a life focused only on food. He joined in the routine and the rituals that were practiced by the other gulls, and yet was not happy. Jonathan was not happy with a life focused only on eating, he did not find fulfillment in a life looking only to live to eat the next day. It was while fighting with another gull that Jonathan at last let the hard won food drop, and sighed thinking that there must be something more; there must be something better than this life of fighting for scraps. The routine led to his despair.

Have you ever felt this way, that there must be something more, that there must be something better than just fighting for scraps, than just collecting scraps, or just trying to live on the few scraps you have? There must be something more than the wash, rinse, and repeat life that we are so easily pulled into. There must be something more than the work, eat, sleep routine that we are drawn to and sucked into. The routine, the same old same old can lead us to look to the horizon and longingly wonder and hope that this is not the fullness of living.

I wonder if Peter ever looked off to the horizon of the Sea of Galilee and yearned for something more. I wonder if Peter ever sighed with despondency and despair as he pulled in yet another net full of fish. I wonder if James and John ever stayed up late talking about what could be, what might be, if only they weren't stuck in this rut, in this life-rotting lifestyle of fishing, gutting, selling, and fishing. I wonder if the clouds of despair ever found themselves gathering around these individuals as they worked all night and all day in an effort to live.

Maybe you have felt this way with your relationship with the church. Maybe you have felt like you have spent all night casting out nets, only to return with nothing again and again. You have held group meetings, but no one came. You went to a Bible study with one other. You have tried to enter worship with a heart yearning for God, but find the similarity of worship weighing down your joyful spirit. The spontaneity, the unexpected joy is gone as you trudge through worship. Maybe you even find yourself looking for God in the routine and the ritual, finding the divine to be lost in the expected and the complacency of the life of the church. Maybe you have found yourself sighing in worship, sighing in Bible study and wondering if there could be more to life than this.

Or in your service and your outreach, maybe you have felt yourself fall into the despair of redundancy. Maybe you feel this as you offer yet another plate of food to a homeless person, wondering when, if ever, the line will end. Maybe you find the routine of service disparaging and distressing. If you ever work at a shelter or soup kitchen, it seems that those who have been working there for a while have a colder and harder persona about them. Has the routine led to despondency?

Maybe you find the routine of the life of the church taxing and empty. Maybe your spiritual life feels empty as it is in a rut. Maybe you feel like you have been up all night, evangelizing and have nothing to show for it. Yet you need to do something, it is necessary to do something, and so you fall into the routine regardless if you expect results. You cast out your net, you pull it in. You cast out your net, you pull it in. Repeat, repeat, and repeat.

We find ourselves trapped in the routine and the mundane aspects of life, seeing everything, hearing everything, but unable to pull out of system. It is like the play by Sartre, *No Exit*. In this play three people find

themselves in Hell, which is a hotel room. The torture of Hell is found in the sharing of each other's thoughts, desires and sins. It is when the three realize that they are stuck with each other, with no exit possible (kinda) that the reality of Hell sets in. This is the existential critique of life. Sartre, Nietzsche, and others and others argue that life is a meaningless process of routines and actions leading to nothing. Life is hell with no exit because there is nothing beyond life.

Maybe you aren't there yet. Maybe you are not yet feeling that level of despair, but when you are stuck in the cycle, in the repetition and find no forward motion, and find no life, than maybe you can feel like this all night evangelism with no results is a Hell with no exit. Maybe you have felt like the routines in your life is a Hell with no exit. Maybe you have touched, maybe you have lived, and maybe you are living in that place where the routine of life leads to a deeper longing and desire fueling your despair.

Movement 3 – The Interruption of Christ

But Jesus steps in. Jesus jumps into the routine, Jesus interrupts the same old same old, and Jesus grabs the rim of the wheel and demands that constant spinning stop. The incarnate Word interrupts the mundane of our life and frees us from the trap of the routine. Jesus steps in.

Jesus comes to the fishermen, washing their nets, finishing up after another fruitless night of casting out and catching nothing. Jesus steps into their normal routine and rituals of fishing, gutting, selling, and sleeping and interrupts the process. He brings with him a large crowd; he brings with him a sense of excitement and importance. His reputation has been growing more and more. The people's expectation of him has been increasing more and more. He has become a minor superstar, moving from the C list to the B list of celebrity status, and he steps in to interrupt the mundane life of the disciples.

Think of it as someone entering into your life, tapping you on the shoulder and awaking you from your dogmatic slumber, from your life's slumber. Think of it as if you are riding on the playground merry-go-round/spinner, and someone reaches out and stops the spinner. Your life is interrupted.

Isaiah received an interruption from God when he saw the Lord on the throne. The vision pulled Isaiah out of his normal, mundane life, and changed him forever. Jeremiah was interrupted, Moses was interrupted, and we are interrupted by God.

Soren Kierkegaard describes this interruption as a moment – a point in time when you experience something greater than the self. It is a point in time when you experience the depth of the divine. It is a moment of transcendence and power. When Jesus got into the boats, when he spoke the Word, I imagine the people on the shore where experiencing this "moment" that Kierkegaard describes. I imagine that the people were hearing more than just the words of a man, but were hearing the words of the divine. Do you see how much of this passage focuses on the Word spoken and proclaimed by Jesus? It was not just his presence, but his revelation, his Word, the divine Word that was interrupting all of those in the crowd and the fishermen. I imagine the fishermen, Peter in particular, were caught by Christ's words, pulling on him and calling him out of the routine and the rotting rituals of his own life.

In this same way Christ calls to us, challenges us and remains with us. In the same way, Christ's words call us out of our slumber, out of our stupor, and we take note and listen. It happens at times when we are not expecting it – in the quiet of prayer, in the rush of traffic, in the chaos of children, or in the quiet conversation with a friend. God reaches down and interrupts us, calling us to wake up and take notice. Christ steps in and interrupts. Maybe it is the word of a friend. Maybe it is a devotion you read, or maybe you actually receive a sign that shakes and disrupts your life. You receive an interruption from Christ. Be ready and open for the interruption every day. Keep your eyes open for the Word of the Lord to transect your life, cutting through the routine and the rituals. Keep your heart open for the interruption of Christ.

Movement 4 – The Revelation of the Divine

The holy nature of our Lord is revealed to us. The interruption is not just a jarring moment, it is a revealing moment. Maybe Jesus was just a good speaker. Maybe Jesus was just a charismatic speaker who could also perform some pretty neat tricks. Maybe Jesus was a special person, but nothing more. On a human level the interruption is interesting, but nothing to leave one's life over. This is why the words of Jesus are so powerful. The people listen to Jesus' words. Peter throws over the net because Jesus "says so," even though he had been throwing over his nets all night with no results. The words of Jesus are powerful and are revealing, but the revelation goes farther. Jesus, through his actions, reveals himself beyond just his words. Jesus shows all of his cards and reveals to Peter and the other fishermen the depth and the power of his identity. That is what it is, a powerful revelation. It is like that moment after his resurrection when he is walking with the two disciples and talking to them about scriptures. All during the conversation their hearts burned with a kind of knowing, but it was not until Jesus broke bread with the disciples that they truly and fully saw the revelation of who Christ was before them. Their hearts were burning, but the power of the full revelation awakened their hearts and their minds and their eyes.

It was that moment when Moses saw the burning bush and was interested and interrupted. Yet when Moses stepped closer he heard a voice telling him to remove his shoes; he was on holy ground. The revelation of the burning bush was revealed; it was a powerful revelation.

When I was serving a church in Dayton, OH we were having an organ recital for some spectacular renovations that were done on the organ. The organ company which had done the renovations had flown in a world renowned artist to perform for the recital. A couple of hours before the recital, one of the members of the church was walking outside when she saw a man in blue jeans and a tee shirt standing outside the door, smoking. The First Baptist church of Dayton is an urban church that received solicitations on a daily basis for money and other kinds of assistance. So if you see someone dress casually smoking outside the church, one could assume that the person was looking for help. This woman went up to the man and said, "We are having an organ recital this evening, so is there something I can help you with right now?" To which the man replied in a thick Brazilian accent, "Madam, I am the organist!"

He revealed himself to my friend and she saw who was truly before her. Christ revealed himself before the fishermen in a powerful way. He called them to do again what they have been doing all night. He called them to try again the fruitless and empty ritual, and in trusting the Word of the Lord, and Peter complied. You know the story. You know the results of Jesus' actions. The nets began to break, the boats began to sink, and there was an abundance of fish. This is an action of the divine! This was the divine revealed! Remember in the end of the gospel of John? A very similar event happens and it is the way that Peter and the beloved disciple recognize who Jesus truly and really is; Peter even jumps off the boat and swims to shore to meet Christ. Christ reveals himself fully to the fishermen and to us in the moment of revelation. This is the essence of Kierkegaard's moment; not just a minor and annoying interruption, but a revelation of that which is greater than we are. The brightness of the actions, the light that shines from the moment reveals the truth. The holy nature of the Lord is revealed to us.

Movement 5 – Our Humble Response

In response we first fall in fear. In the face of the greatness of the divine, of the power of the Lord, what do we do but tremble? What can we embrace but fear as we face such truth? Is that your first reaction, to be afraid?

Do you hear what Peter says when he realized the fullness of the identity of Jesus? Peter falls on his knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Maybe Peter is afraid that Jesus knows all that he has done, has seen all that he has done, and is ashamed. Do you remember what Isaiah said when he saw the full glory of the Lord? "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of

unclean lips...” Both of these great leaders in the history of the church fall down in fear and trembling when they realize the truth and the power of the Lord in their respective revelations.

Think about this for a moment. What would you think if someone said to you, “I have seen everything you have done, and I know all of your thoughts?” Would you be a little terrified? Or what if Jesus walked into this church? Last week we talked about showing off that which we are proud of, but what if your shame overcomes your pride. What if you see Jesus walking down the road towards the church and you wonder if maybe you should have spent more on outreach programs and less on fixing up the building. You wonder if maybe you should have spent more time reading and teaching the bible then reading the tabloids. You wonder if maybe you should have offered a little more support for the poor, the destitute and the broken. And at the moment when Jesus comes to the front door, you open it up and say, “Have mercy on us, Lord, for though we have tried to be a church, we have failed in so many ways.”

What is it we fear but that Christ will name us for whom or for what we are. We fear that Christ also sees the routine and the rituals, the emptiness in our lives and will be disappointed (at best). Paul Tillich says that when you face the infinite, the ultimate of God, you then realize your finite, fallen nature and can then fall into an ultimate despair. What if Christ names our broken nature? What if Christ goes to each one of us and names the sin we have most recently committed? What if Christ preaches Jeremiah’s sermon from the temple steps at our front door, condemning our worship, our offerings and our attempts to please God? What if Christ sees us as we truly are, in an honest and naked way? Wouldn’t we be ashamed and afraid? The power of the revelation can shine a light on our whole life and that might not be good.

What is it that we fear but that the light of Christ will shine on us and show who we truly and fully are. We fear that Christ, in revealing himself, will reveal us. We respond with fear.

Movement 6 – Christ’s Commission

Yet Christ picks us up, and after proclaiming us as something more than we are, sends us into the world. The revelation of Jesus as Lord, of Jesus as the Christ embraces us, encourages us, and proclaims us as someone holy, someone precious, and someone special. Christ doesn’t say to Peter, yes you are a sinner. Christ doesn’t even acknowledge Peter’s sins. Rather, Christ proclaims who Peter truly and fully is and is called to be and gives him the possibility of living into that proclamation. Christ says, “from now on you will be fishing for people.” In essence, Christ is saying, “you once sought out fish for your own livelihood, for your own sustenance. But now, you will seek out people. Yet Christ does not just say, “You will fish for people.” He uses different words, different inflections and different meaning. You catch fish and kill them. Christ is calling Peter and James and John to catch people and save them. Jesus is not only proclaiming who Peter will be, but the ministry that Peter will do. Peter will be one to proclaim the glory of the Lord, saving the lives of so many that the nets will break.

Jesus comes to you, as you are stuck in your routine, and you fall in your shame and proclaims you as a worthy child of God, called to go, catch people and save people. From now on you shall take people, and you shall take them alive. Jesus is proclaiming not his own identity, but your identity; a child of God and one who proclaims the Gospel. You may our may not leave your routines, but your life is now following Jesus. You are no longer stuck, because you are always working and walking towards a higher purpose, towards a higher ground.

When you are serving others, and not knowing why, Jesus reminds you that you are serving more than food, you are offering more than shelter, you are serving life, the life found in Christ. I have worked with secular groups helping the least of the world and I can see how individuals can get lost in the routine and the rut. It becomes the same old same old and often feels hopeless. Yet when you serve as a servant of Christ, then you are offering hope and help that comes from God.

Jesus calls this church that is often stuck in its own routines rituals and ways and says, you shall be a place that calls people to life. Jesus proclaims the identity of the disciples, of his followers and of us; not sinners but followers and doers of the Word. We are people who capture others for life in Christ. We don't have to primarily worry about the building. We don't have to primarily worry about our programs. Jesus has proclaimed us a people who are primarily gathered to share the good news of life found in Christ.

You cannot return to the mundane of life. You cannot return to the normal and the routine. Your nets will come up empty. You can evangelize all night, you can work all night, you can try to be productive all night, but without the Lord, your all night evangelization will be fruitless. Yet when you follow Jesus, then your nets will be full. When you leave all that you have, your life rotting routines and follow Jesus, then your life will be full. When you take what Kierkegaard calls the 'theological suspension of the ethical' make the foolish choice and follow Jesus, then you will start to live. Then you will hear the proclamation that you are a child of God, blessed and called to capture other people for life.

Moses was proclaimed the leader of Israel. Isaiah was proclaimed a prophet. John the Baptist was proclaimed the forerunner of Jesus. Jesus was proclaimed the messiah. We are proclaimed followers of Jesus. Stay with Jesus in your life. Stay with Jesus as a church, and know that no matter what we will be protected and we will thrive because we are loved and adored by our Lord. Stay with Jesus, and know that when you cast out your nets on Christ's behalf, according to Christ's words then they will return full.

AMEN