

Illuminate your path for us and help us hear your wisdom. Oh God, our great creator, Amen.

Yesterday, I spent the day at the diocesan leadership retreat. It's a time when the newly elected and forming leadership bodies come together and orient themselves for their work ahead. Our Commission on Ministry, Standing Committee, Board of Trustees, and their committees all come together for a day of welcome and learning. The theme of the day and for the diocese this year is stepping out with soul. We grounded ourselves in scripture whose message wove itself throughout the day.

Beginning with an in depth overview of diocesan structures, roles, and responsibilities helped to set the stage for the introductions that would come later. The room was filled with those who had served for years and some for the very first time all willing to give of themselves, to ensure the business of the church moves forward in what continues to be a challenging time for many across the diocese.

As each group began to meet the clarity of gifts and talents each person brought to the space would blend into the work at hand.

In today's text, we hear a very specific way of referencing time. John the Baptist had been arrested, and we now see Jesus entering Galilee. He shares the good news that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." As a result, those who hear the good news are to repent and believe. To repent or reorient one's life towards God.

As Jesus continues his time in Galilee, he comes upon Simon and Andrew and calls them from their lives as fishermen to follow him. After Jesus calls to them, they leave their nets and follow. Then Jesus called James and his brother John from their boats as they were mending their nets. They, too, come and follow Jesus. One of the familiar lines from this text is, "Follow me and

I will make you fish for people." One of the commentaries I use suggests that a better translation of this text is "Follow me, and I will make you fishers for people." In this updated translation fishing becomes more of an identity instead of an action. The follower becomes the fisher as opposed to simply going fishing. The intention of what it really means to follow Jesus and be called by name is more fully captured.

From the beginning of the text and John the Baptist's arrest, we see a foreshadowing of the difficulties and potential danger that might await those who follow this path.

Yet, Jesus reassures us of the good news that comes from believing and reorienting one's life toward God.

As we continued our work to step out with soul, we ended our time with the Eucharist and prayed together. Being sent forth with new understandings of the work before the diocese, its structures, and most importantly, the people who those structures represent. It was clear to me from our day together that the relational was just as important as any form of transactional work that might have happened that day.

We all brought our full selves to the table, a room full of gifts and talents brought forth to serve in a multitude of ways.

Called to face problems with curiosity and allow themselves to sit in discomfort. To be present to the Holy Spirit as she works through local and regional contexts providing insight for larger diocesan challenges.

Not everyone has to serve on a committee or be on a board. In fact, I completely understand those who might be meeting averse. Yet how are we each using our unique skills and talents to answer the call?

Sometimes, we forget that we can be more than one thing at a time. We are intersectional people. Our Christian identities can also intersect with who we are outside of the church's walls. We can bring our worldly gifts into the church and vice versa.

This text is calling us into a different way of thinking. A new way of being, where we lay down the nets of our current lives and follow Jesus into a new life and community.

So, what might it mean for us to claim a Christian identity in our modern time? How have you already answered the call and how might you renew it?

For some of us, this might be how we walk in the world: acts of kindness, honoring the dignity of every human in the ways we know matter to them.

It might also manifest in how we spend our money or time through acts of visible service in the community or at church. It might mean service on a committee or sitting in a meeting. Maybe it means helping with coffee hour or serving during our service.

It might look like learning about a different community we aren't a part of to be more inclusive and welcoming or to make our space more accessible in some way. This might also

look like being open to asking questions, sitting in discomfort and being ok that there aren't easy answers.

This shows up in how we talk about our lives, how we share our witness in the world when we talk about the communities that matter to us, when we talk about what we did this weekend.

When we make mention of the amazing people we spend our Sundays with or volunteer with during the month.

To claim our Christian identity in all of its many manifestations is to honor how Jesus calls each of us by name when he says "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."

So, as we go out from here this week and the many weeks to come my prayer for us all is that we are open to the many ways we may answer Jesus's call to Follow and be present to what it feels like to be called by name and witness the world God has created knowing we are beloved.

Amen