

Sermon: "Where Did He Get All This?"
by Kelley O'Connor
Scripture: Mark 6: 1-13
July 15, 2012

Dear Jesus! Stands up to spread the Good News among those who know and love him best and they don't believe a word of it. They have watched Jesus grow up and watched him wrestle with his brothers and work with his dad. What right did he have to speak to them as if he were the chosen one - as if he had the authority to do the works of God!

I wonder what it felt like for Jesus when he knew it was time. Time to answer the call - time to live into the person he was created to be - time to take on the world - say what he had come to say. It must have been scary. He probably thought the one safe place to be would be at home - with the people he loved. Surely they could see him as he was meant to be. Surely they could allow him the room to become who he was becoming.

But that just isn't always the way it is. Sometimes we can't see the changes in a person because our expectation is that they will always be the same - they will always be the person we have always seen - with all the same faults and gifts and nothing more, nothing less. I've witnessed this over and over, especially with young people. We've watched them grow up in the church. We remember when they were in the nursery, when they received their first bible from the Sunday School. We remember their confirmation and their rowdy teen years. We've seen them argue with their mother in public and cuff their little brother when he wasn't looking. There is no way that young man is ever going to teach Sunday School in this church - or be trusted with the youth, or run the sound booth. And what do we do? We run them right out of our church by never recognizing or utilizing them as adults with gifts to share. And more often than not we run them right out of church all together!

But we need to be very careful. Because kids do grow up and they mature and begin to find their gifts and calling and voice. And what safer place for them to try on their new skin but in the church surrounded by people who love them and really do want the best for them.

Unfortunately it wasn't like that for Jesus. He was with a skeptical, unaccepting congregation. One who couldn't see him for what he was becoming - only what he had been - a kid, a brother, a son. But he knew better. He felt it inside - something big - telling him it was time to fulfill his destiny.

It can happen that way for all of us. You know how it is - we all go along doing what we do; sometimes with great satisfaction -but then we begin feeling a nudge toward change, sometimes with a deep longing for a different life. But it's easier to keep doing what we do because life is what it is and change is hard and disruptive. It's scary and holds so much of the unknown under our noses that the smell sends us running in the other direction - or at least encourages us to dig in our heels ever more deeply into the ground on which we already stand.

I was a youth pastor most of my adult life. I had a gift for it. I had a full time job with benefits, worked for a large church, built a big, active program, was included in many parts of the church life by a pastor that believed his staff members were his pastor colleagues and should be involved in all facets of the church. I shared that time with Darlene actually - we were part of a large staff trying to do great things. During our time at First United Methodist Church we started a second campus on Stony Point because we were outgrowing the downtown church and soon we were running back and forth, participating in 6 worship services every week between the two campuses, doing youth ministry, and music in both places.

My job in worship was usually offering the pastoral prayer. I liked that - I loved writing and I could get up and give the prayer while no one was watching because everyone had their eyes closed - so I didn't need to be afraid. It was a good job for me.

Well, one day at our weekly staff meeting the pastor said, "Kelley, I'm going to be gone in July and I'd like you to preach while I'm away." I said, "no thanks." He looked at me and said, "Kelley, I'm going to be gone in July and I'd like you to preach while I'm away." I said, "I heard you the first time. No way." He looked more intently at me and said, "Kelley I want you to preach. You're ready to preach. Think it over and let me know tomorrow." I said, "OK I'll tell you no tomorrow."

I went home, sick to my stomach at the idea of standing in the pulpit that so clearly belonged to Pastor Dave. I slumped down in my chair in front of the TV and picked up the remote hoping to zone out for a while so I could calm down. I began flipping through the channels and came upon the Waltons. I love sappy shows like the Waltons and Little House on the Prairie - they always make me cry - very therapeutic- so I sat back and began to watch.

This episode was about John Boy. John Boy, if you can believe it, had been asked by the local pastor to preach for him on the following Sunday, while the pastor was away. I just about cried. "You've GOT to be kidding, God! Could you give me a

break here?"

I watched to see if John Boy was going to give in. He had all the same worries I did. What right did I have to preach to anyone? What could I possibly say that would make a difference in anyone's life? How could I follow Dave Storpe – the best preacher I'd ever heard? Of course there was a slight chance no one would come if they heard Dave was going to be gone.

Well, wouldn't you know – John Boy did it and he didn't die.

I went in to work the next day and Dave asked me if I had decided whether or not I would preach. I said, "Yeah I'll do it."

He looked shock.

"Don't ask," I said.

That was it. I got into the pulpit and the Spirit got into me and here I am.

But it hasn't been easy. I started out going to licensing school where I quickly became a Licensed Local Pastor and was shortly thereafter appointed to a church. After three summers at Claremont School of Theology's Course of Study I was feeling like maybe the education I was getting was too abbreviated for the work I was doing and I should probably just go to seminary. My district committee had been pushing me to do it. The problem was I didn't have a BA. I stopped half way through college to get married and have kids, which I did. I had four of them, as you know, so going back to school was just never an option.

I talked to God about all this. I told God that I was getting the impression that maybe God wanted me to get into the ordination process. I said I was willing but I just really didn't want to have to go to school for the next five or six years to do that. So I suggested that maybe God would like to find a way for me to do all this easily. In fact I told God that if he would make it easy for me I would do it.

Well, I just want to say, here and now, that that is not a good thing to say to God.

There is no easy way to get a BA and Master of divinity degree, while raising a family and pasturing a church full time SO I was in school forever and it wasn't

easy in any way whatsoever. I am glad I was able to give God a good laugh. SO now, many years later, in debt so as to be embarrassed, a BA and an Mdiv in hand, a certified candidate for 12 years, I have finally been commissioned as a resident in ministry meaning that my goal of ordination is within reach. My only goal at this point is to not have to give my ordination sermon the same year I have to give my retirement sermon at Annual Conference.

Throughout all these things - throughout the trials and joys - there has been in me a drive I can't explain, a thirst I can't quench, a deep desire I can't quiet to see the church change and become significant in a new way to people who cannot understand it and therefore cannot be helped by it in its present state. I want the Christian church to survive and thrive in a world where it is quickly becoming insignificant. It excites me to think about what we in this room can do, to help make that happen.

Anyway I'm telling you all this in the hope that you will remember your own story - the birth of it all, the call to cast your nets into the deep, the wilderness wanderings - the temptations and the angels watching over you bringing you here to this place on this day.

I'm telling you this because I hope you will remember what drives you to be a part of this body of Christ, what excites you about the ministry here at St. John's, what deep desires call to you in the middle of the night and will not be ignored.

Jesus had to answer to the voice inside of him. He could do none other than what he did and aren't we thankful that he followed through?!

Spiritually we spend most of our lives in shallow water, but not because we have no sense of commitment. We try to serve God. We go to church. We serve on committees. We go to classes. We try to do what God wants us to do. But we stay with what's familiar. We stay where we feel safe. We don't want to risk being labeled a fanatic after all. We avoid things that make us look too Christian in public.

Because we're afraid of what God might ask of us we just don't risk putting out into the deep water of our faith. And sometimes we need the security of shallow water, because life can be hard and disappointing. But at some point we will be asked to do something beyond our comfort zone. Asked to be a friend to someone we'd rather not, or go somewhere we never pictured ourselves going, or preach a sermon - God loves us right where we are we are told over and over, but god also loves us way too much to leave us there.

Again and again God calls out to us, through our brokenness, through our inadequacies, through our fear, depression and hopelessness, through our feelings of insecurity until we come to that place of hope where we finally and freely say, "here I am, Lord, send me." And the wonder of it all is that when we do, we truly find out who we are meant to be. "This is my beloved in whom I am well pleased," is what God said to Jesus and I believe it's what God says to us as God watches us push our boats further and further into the water.

It is in the incomprehensible depths of God's love that we meet our true potential. It is in setting out into the deep water that we claim and lay hold of all God has in store for us.

Emmet Fox says this in his book, *Your Heart's Desire...*

The most secret, sacred wish that lies deep down at the bottom of your heart, the wonderful thing that you hardly dare to look at, or think about – the thing you would rather die than have anyone else know of, because it seems so far beyond anything that you are, or have at the present time, that you fear that you would be cruelly ridiculed if the thought of it were known – that is just the very thing that God is wishing you to do or to be for him. And the birth of that marvelous wish in your soul – the dawning of that secret dream – was the voice of God himself telling you to arise and come up higher because he has need of you.

God calls us all; sometimes to be a disciple, sometimes to be a minister, sometimes to be a fireman or teacher or grocer. Wherever we are, God is calling us to put our nets out one more time; into the deep waters – and take a chance on the abundant life, the risky, adventurous, faithful life – the life that is truly life. Amen.