

Called out of your shell

Matthew 4: 12-23

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Hermit crabs protect the soft part of their abdomen by finding the right sized salvaged shell, and carrying it around with them. If they need to protect themselves they can fit their whole body into it, claws last as a warning to any predator. As they age they need to find bigger shells or they wont grow, and if they are shell-less, predators will have an easy snack. Sometimes they do this thing called a vacancy chain; if a crab finds a shell that's a bit too big they sit beside it and wait, successively smaller crabs attach themselves to the waiting crab and when a crab comes along that fits the bigger shell, it moves in, leaving the old shell for the waiting crab, who moves in and the chain keeps going. Sometimes they fight with each other to the death over a good shell.

Pslam 27 begins, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?' We are not hermit crabs, retreating to the darkness and safety of our borrowed shell. We are called out into the world to follow Jesus, in the light that was spoken in the beginning. Out of the primordial darkness, out of the darkness of our self-interest and self-protection, out of the darkness of the shadow of death and into the light of life.

Matthew's gospel tells us that on hearing about the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus moves from the centre to the edge, away from Jerusalem, from here he will begin his long and steady journey back. He makes his home by the sea in Galilee of the Gentiles. He goes north, to fulfill the scriptures, a vital part of the theme of Matthew's gospel. Jesus makes his home in the fertile, populated border country of Zebulon and Naphtali, two of the 12 tribes of Israel. It's a place of diversity that bore the first brunt of the Assyrian invasion. They are a people open to new ideas. He is living by the sea and Jesus' ministry begins by gathering his tribe.

Matthew tells us that Jesus took over the cry of John the Baptist, like handing on the mantle from Elijah to Elisha; 'Repent, the kingdom is amongst you.' Repent means 'turn around'. If you turn towards the light, the shadow falls behind you. If you turn your back on the light, you sit in the shadow. Turning around is something we do many times on our journey of faith, we follow, we fall, we wander, we call, we look for the light... and we turn around and follow again, always keeping our face to the light that dispels even the deepest darkness.

Jesus calls the fisherman and they leave their nets and their families and follow him. They leave the security of their shell, the protection of family and tradition, the life that they have built and known, they turn their backs and walk away with Jesus into a new life. I wonder what the father of James and John thought as he watched his sons walk away? There is pain in the breaking of our old life; there is sacrifice in following Jesus, there is a cost to discipleship. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was imprisoned and killed for his part in attempting to bring down Hitler, wrote many books and letters. In the book, *Cost of Discipleship* he wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Jesus calls us into the unknown, into the fertile border country, away from the safe centre, to follow him to death and beyond. He calls us from the protective darkness of our shells into the vulnerability of the living in the light.

Jesus' ministry starts and, with his followers, he moves around the countryside teaching, proclaiming and healing. This is the beginning, by the sea in the border country. The ending will begin in Jerusalem but it will not be completed there. It comes back full circle to Galilee. In Matthews account, at the empty tomb, both the angel and the risen Jesus tell the women that he will meet them in Galilee, back beside the sea.

Some questions for you today:

- What is your shell? What do you carry around to protect you in times of fear and threat? Is it helpful or is it heavy and does it plunge you into darkness and isolation?
- What does repentance look like for you? What kind of 'turning around' do you need to do in order to face the light?
- How do you respond when Jesus reaches out his hand and looks you in the eye and says, 'Follow me.' What do you walk away from? What do you walk into?
- How might we participate in Jesus' call to bring light to others, to bring them out of the darkness to offer hope and healing?

Blessings. Jennie

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