



“Two Roads Diverged”

Scripture – Luke 5:1-11

Sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Gregory Knox Jones

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The human eye is a remarkable organ, isn't it? If you have ordinary vision and it is dark enough, you can spot the light of a single candle more than a mile and a half away. More amazing, you can see a star that is hundreds of light years away.

Our eyes enable us to drink in a majestic sunset or savor the beauty of a rainbow or delight in the grin of a newborn. Of course, our eyes also behold smog blanketing a city, a park littered with trash, and the grisly residue of war.

We have choices where we cast our eyes, but as a colleague points out, there is an intense struggle for our attention. In a new book called *The Sirens' Call*, the author writes, “Our attention is a wildly valuable resource, and some of the world's most powerful corporations extract it in increasingly sophisticated ways, leaving us feeling like bystanders to our minds.”¹ Of course it is not simply powerful corporations. Advertisers, entertainers, and politicians do outrageous things to grab our gaze. Which leads us to ponder: where is our focus?

Robert Frost wrote, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both.” However, as a contemporary author reminds us, most of us believe we *can* travel both – and “not only both, but other roads as well. ‘I'm in a clearing, four roads diverge, and I can't miss a thing: I'll take all four!’ But we cannot take four² or three or even two” or we will wind up fragmented, uncertain, and scattered.

Which road will YOU take? That is the question hovering over today's scripture reading.

Sixty miles northeast of Jerusalem is a large body of water known by several names. The Sea of Tiberias, the Lake of Gennesaret, but most often, the Sea of Galilee. It's not really a sea, but a freshwater lake, and in the first century, it had a reputation for fabulous fishing.

Jesus conducted much of his ministry in this area, and in today's passage we read that Jesus is standing at the water's edge teaching a crowd who has wandered out to hear him. As he shares his spellbinding

insights, the crowd swells. Hoping to catch a glimpse of him and not to miss any gems of wisdom, listeners keep edging closer.

Jesus steps back again and again until he is about to topple into the lake. Fortunately, he spots two boats on the shore where the men have just come in from fishing. The charismatic rabbi asks the owner of one of the boats if he will row him out a short distance to open a little breathing room. The man thinks, “Well, the fishing has been terrible, so why not?” Jesus climbs into the boat, and Simon Peter and his crew row out a short way. Jesus resumes teaching.

Does Jesus share any of his clever parables? Does he mention any commandments? Our passage falls silent. However, once he wraps up his talk, he turns to Simon Peter and encourages him to try his luck one more time. He says, “Toss your nets into the deep water.”

Peter recognizes Jesus as an impressive teacher, calling him ‘Master,’ but he is skeptical of his fishing prowess. He says, “Master, we have been fishing all night and we haven’t caught a single fish.” Common sense suggests it is time to head for the house and get some rest; but Peter complies. Perhaps Jesus kept insisting and Peter relented. More likely, Peter decided to prove to Jesus that they simply were not going to catch any fish that day. So, what the heck, one last heave. The net hits the surface of the water and begins to sink.

A few seconds after the net vanishes into the deep blue, Peter barks the command to his men. “Pull in the nets!”

The words are barely out of his mouth when one of the men shouts, “We can’t!” The nets are so filled with fish they cannot hoist them. So they signal their partners in the other boat to come quickly and help them land this enormous catch. The other boat pulls alongside, and Luke tells us that both boats are so full of fish that they nearly sink.

If the passage ended there, the message might be something about the miraculous power of Jesus or something about persistence and never giving up. However, when Peter witnesses the haul of a lifetime, rather than becoming ecstatic and promising to buy the first round for all of his mates; and rather than inviting Jesus to come out onto the lake again tomorrow, what does he do? Peter panics. Our passage says, “He fell down at Jesus’s knees and exclaimed, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Peter felt he was not worthy to keep company with Jesus. He believed only someone with a higher moral standing was fit to associate with him. But the master wasn’t having it. He said to Peter what God said to Abraham, what a messenger from God said to Hagar, what Moses said to the Hebrews, and what the angels said to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid.”

Then, Jesus said to him, “From now on, you will be catching people.” And our passage ends with this: “When they brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

Jesus was compelling; his words about God were passionate and promising. However, Peter was not under some mystical spell in which his personal freedom evaporated. Jesus did not coerce Peter to follow him; he invited him. Suddenly and without warning, Peter found himself where two roads diverged. He could continue with what was comfortable and remain a fisherman, or he could risk it all on the promises

of this compelling prophet. He could remain in his own village and keep his same friends, or he could walk away from it all and step into a bold new future. He could stick with the predictable or he could move into the unknown.

Is it any wonder Luke tells us that Peter was afraid? He was terrified of making the wrong decision. He could continue his routine and eke out a living or he could shoot the moon. Becoming a follower of this amazing teacher sounded exciting, but what if Jesus' promise of a rich life turned out to be fool's gold?

The decision to follow Jesus has NEVER been an easy one because Jesus likes to mess with our priorities. He challenges us to put others before ourselves. He challenges us to resist injustice. He challenges us to swim against the tide when the tide is flowing in the wrong direction.

Writer Jonathan Mandell reminded me of one of the speeches by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Not his "I have a Dream" sermon nor his final, "I've been to the mountaintop." And not his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. But rather, a long speech he gave at a few colleges in which he talked about being maladjusted.

King said, "Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word in psychology. It is the word maladjusted. It is the ring and cry of modern child psychology and certainly we all want to avoid a maladjusted life. We all want to live a well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But I must honestly say there are some things in our nation and the world to which I am proud to be maladjusted and wish all people of goodwill would be maladjusted until the good society is realized."

"I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few...I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence."³

I believe that in February 2025, the call to follow Jesus is a challenge to live a maladjusted life. For me personally, I refuse to adjust to bigotry toward people of color. I refuse to adjust to discrimination against people in the LGBTQ community. I refuse to adjust to taking people's land away from them. I refuse to adjust to calling criminals "patriots." I refuse to adjust to silencing freedom of speech. I refuse to adjust to trading kindness for hate, truth for deception, humility for arrogance, and generosity for selfishness.

God not only loves us; God also calls us to live a life in sync with that first century rabbi who was out of step with his society, but completely in harmony with God.

Fred Craddock tells of the time he walked into an unfamiliar grocery store to pick up a jar of peanut butter. It was a huge store and he had no idea where to begin his search. So when he saw a woman pushing a cart and looking like she knew where she was going, he went up to her and said, "Could you direct me to the peanut butter?"

She spun around, eyes glaring, and said "Are you trying to hit on me?"

Craddock said, “I’m just looking for the peanut butter.” He backed away and spotted a store employee who directed him to the correct aisle. Craddock picked up a jar and headed for the checkout counter. As he did, he encountered you know who.

She looked at the jar of peanut butter in his hand, and said, “I guess you really were looking for peanut butter.”

Craddock said, “That’s what I told you.”

To which she said, “Nowadays, you just can’t be too careful.”

Craddock paused and then replied, “Yes you can. You can be too careful.”³

We know there are times when you need to be careful. We teach our children to be extra cautious when they cross the street. We need to be careful about taking the right dose of our medicine. We need to be careful when we are driving – no texting! But when it comes to following Jesus, we are rarely called to be careful.

Four roads diverged in a yellow wood. Once you muster the courage, which road will YOU choose?

NOTES

1. Kirby Lawrence Hill quoting Chris Hayes, *The Sirens’ Call*, Penguin Press, 2025.
2. James Howell, “Commentary on Psalm 1,” *workingpreacher.com*, September 5, 2010.
3. Jonathan Mandell, “I am Proud to Be Maladjusted,” *newyorktheatre.me*, January 13, 2023.
4. Amy Starr Redwine, “The fifth Sunday after the epiphany,” *A Sermon for Every Sunday*, 2022.