

TRUST – the hardest thing

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Pastor Esther Dant

This is a very familiar story. Years ago, we were having an education banquet at another church. My friend, Bill Sherman, was the MC of this large gathering. He began with this scripture reading. Then he asked us to visualize all those boats, full of fish, abandoned and setting in the sun for days. Then he said that was the beginning of lutefisk!

“The time is here,” the scriptures tell us. The Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus first preaching. God’s hour has come. People were called to a change of heart and an acceptance of this news that John had been preparing for. What had to be learned and what proved to be the hardest lesson of all for the new disciples to learn, was that the reign of God was not to be a cataclysmic triumph by an earthly Messiah, but a quiet rule over the hearts of people; the rule of God, said Christ, was ‘within his disciples.’

The disciples are called two by two in our Gospel – to follow. But to restrict the force of the passage to clergy and to other church workers is an abuse of its meaning. Jesus’ “Follow me” confronts us all with a decision that lies deeper than the question of earning a living. His call to discipleship focuses on the question of life’s ultimate loyalty, a question more basic than that of vocational choice. It speaks to Christians whose lives are humdrum, whose discipleship has degenerated into a preoccupation with things like nets and boats.

We are called in many different ways, but it does require a leaving or letting go. With retirement a few years away, a full time salary with a master’s degree and twenty years tenure, I heard that not so still small voice, “You are finished here.” Quietly, I went to Nancy Maeker, dean of students at Luther and asked her about working there. It’s one of those exchanges you never forget. “Is it time to come back?” I think my face turned white. “Is it the money?” “YES... and Greek and Hebrew.” (I had a reputation during my first master’s there as the “contemplative.” Languages are hard.) “I’ll be back,” she said as she left the room, and she was. She offered me a president’s scholarship for one year of tuition. Then the Greek book came – a gift from Dave and Sue Gitch. They lived in Washington State and came for a visit. They encouraged me to look through it and see if it would be helpful. There, halfway through

was a hole cut into the pages, the size of a check. There lay a check for my books....all my books. Generous people living generous lives. It is our theme here at ULCH right now.

Slowly one starts to see glimpses of this being the good plan when another moment comes like this one. I was studying online for the dreaded Bible exam one evening when I felt tears coming. I realized these verses have been with me all my life, and began when all nine of us gathered around the kitchen table and listened to our father's voice reading our evening devotions and watched his face lit by the flame in our lamp.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," St. Paul says. "God is at work in you." Frederick Buechner tells of leaving an office after signing his first book contract. He was floating! There was a messenger boy whom he had known slightly in college. A sense of sadness came over him. "I had been lucky, he hadn't," he thought. "We talked for a bit and then said goodbye. I didn't mention what had just happened to me. What I felt was something better and truer than I was or am and it happened as perhaps all things do, as a gift." God is at work in all of us. We need to listen and pay attention to our lives. C. S. Lewis has a great description for this Christian life in "Beyond Personality," written in 1940. My friend Sue of the Greek book and I have just started this for our twice a month book study, across the miles. I quote from the chapter called, Nice People or New Men. Since this was written 75 years ago, I will call them New People for today. *"Well, the thing has happened: The new step has been taken and is being taken. New people are dotted here and there all over the earth. Every now and then one meets them. Their voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier. They will not be very like the idea of 'religious people' which you have formed from your own general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think you are being kind to them when they are really being kind to you. They love you more than other people do, but they need you less. (We must get over wanting to be needed: in some goodish people, that is the hardest of all temptations to resist.) New People will usually seem to have a lot of time: you will wonder where it comes from. It is something like that with Christ and us. The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let him take us over, the more truly we become ourselves. It is no good trying to be ourselves without him!"*

I see new people all around here in this church. It is in the sharing of how people come together to care for another whose news seems unbearable. It is why we were created – to live together new people. It is what God hopes for us and for our congregation. He died for this!

But...TRUST still is the hardest thing! AMEN!!