

TEXT: Luke 5:1-11  
THEME: Overwhelmed by bigger and better things  
SUBJECT: Call  
TITLE: Fullness of Life

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany  
10 February 2019  
Messiah Moravian  
Jerry Harris

Elsa Buchner, at the age of twenty-two, heard the call of adventure and made a vow: Every five years she would stop whatever she was doing and do something different. For more than fifty years, she did just that. She worked in accounting, magazine production, advertising, sales, business consulting, and the jewelry business, to name a few.

She wrote musicals. At the age of fifty-five she traveled across Europe with a knapsack on her back, and married at seventy for the first time. At the start of each venture, she marked her calendar for five years hence and, true to her word, moved on - though she made an exception for her marriage.

“Its easy to succumb to tradition and security,” she said. “In fact, I do get terribly attached to things and am quite sentimental, so all the leavings have been painful. But it’s part of the adventure, and there’s so much I’ve wanted to do in life. Security is certainly wonderful to have, but not at the price of inertia. I’ll have plenty of that in the grave.”

Luke doesn’t tell us how Simon, James and John felt about leaving their nets, their boats, their families. He just says, “They left everything and followed Jesus.” Did they feel any pain? Perhaps they were not too sentimental. You have to wonder what the conversation around the dinner table in their homes that night was like.

Elsa believed that if you love something you must let it evolve. To obey means to hear, so if you are obedient to your own heart, the leaps you take in allowing your life to unfold are not so much risks as responses. It is challenging, Elsa said, to decide what responses you are willing to make to your life and how much risk you are willing to take to assure that your life turns out the way you want it to.

Luke shows us disciples who respond to the call of Jesus without, apparently, much consideration of the risks. Luke reports no internal dialogue, no second thoughts, no hint of conflicted loyalties, of a self divided.

I find this unrealistic and less than helpful. I want William Faulkner’s version of this story. In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech in 1950, Faulkner said, “. . .the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself *alone* can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.”

To be asked to leave everything, work, home, family, and not know a heart in conflict with itself no matter how noble the cause, strikes me as odd.

Elsa allowed herself to be moved to adventure by her convictions. She was living in NY City, running a jewelry business when, one day, a friend called from Arizona and told her about an

Indian tribe that owned a troubled gemstone mine. Unscrupulous buyers were paying them a fraction of what the stones were worth. Could Elsa help?

Elsa was interested in gems, had a marketing background, hated injustice, and felt an affinity with Native Americans. Her father had grown up on a Chippewa reservation in Minnesota. It felt like fate, so she said “Yes.”

She set aside her business in NY, spent her own savings and borrowed money, and went to live in a trailer on the edge of an Native American reservation in Arizona, where she could help the San Carlos Apaches set up a development plan for their mine.

The tribe’s spiritual leader, who had invited her, had also admitted to mistrusting white people. So when Elsa arrived in Arizona, she said, “The spiritual leader tested me many times to gauge my level of commitment. He kept me waiting for three days before meeting with me. I used the time to learn more about the project. There was no backing down. You risk doing the great thing.”

Simon, James and John, were minding their own business, literally. They had an unprofitable day at work. Jesus invites them to work overtime. After a mild protest, they consent and are rewarded with a record catch. Simon becomes overwhelmed by fear. He tells Jesus to get lost. Jesus responds, “Do not be afraid.”

Fear binds us to safety and security. Fear inflates the risks, stifles the heart’s longing for adventure. “We cannot command ourselves to feel less fear,” says Scott Bader-Saye. “Our overwhelming fears need, themselves, to be overwhelmed by bigger and better things, by a sense of adventure and fullness of life that comes from locating our fears and vulnerabilities within a larger story that is ultimately hopeful.”

Jesus calls Simon to the work of persuading people to align their lives with the values of the Kingdom of God rather than with those of the kingdom of Caesar. Peter’s fear of Jesus is overwhelmed by a bigger and better thing, the struggle for a more just order. There isn’t a soldier, a civil rights crusader, who doesn’t know the reality of their fears being overwhelmed by a larger care.

What your heart, your life, may be calling you to, what God may be calling you to, I do not know. How you discern which calls are worth the risks, merit the response of your life, I do not know.

What I do know is the fullness of life follows letting go of the securities that cling like plastic wrap around our souls, suffocating adventure out of us. The fullness of life comes when our fears are overwhelmed by bigger and better things, when we become actors in a larger, more hopeful story. Fullness of life comes with the courage to live, really live - not merely exist.