

“LEAVE AND FOLLOW”
SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 6: 1-8; LUKE 5: 1-11
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
February 9, 2019
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Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

6:2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

6:3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

6:4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

6:5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.

6:7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Luke 5:1-11

5:1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret (*Ge nes ser ett*), and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,

5:2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

5:3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water

and let down your nets for a catch."

5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

5:6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

5:7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

5:9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;

5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who are partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

5:11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Word of the LORD.
Thanks be to God.

Have you ever had to leave everything and flee your home?

This is one of the questions we asked in the PART (Power and Race Team) and CST (Creating Sanctuary Team) class on mass incarceration and mass deportation class this past fall.

We had just watched an excerpt of the documentary film, *Genesis of Exodus*.¹

The root causes of migration from Central America confronted us in the stories of families, in the stories of women and children, in the stories of men of all ages. These were stories of people not simply searching for a better life, but desperate people fleeing intolerable violence in their communities, in their homes. These were stories of exploitation, rape, and broken promises.

And then we were asked to share our own stories in response to the question: Have you ever had to leave everything?

Some told stories of being displaced from our homes because of storms, fire, or domestic violence.

Others told stories of home places that had stood the test of time and seemed to exist in an alternate universe from the tumult and pain the movie reflected back to us.

Still others told stories about being unsafe in their own home and of being unable to leave because of fear, because of very real danger, because of other people who would be left behind.

*Conocimiento*² is the practice we used in the class to share our stories of leaving home. This word means “knowing” and its practice emerged in the Chicano movement in the 1960s. It builds community, transformation, and equity through cultivating awareness of ourselves and deep sharing of each other’s stories.

The more there is mutually ennobling space for us to know each other, the more any unity that emerges will be life-giving for all. The more we deeply listen to each other, the more our unity will be healing and not re-harming to those who have been exploited and oppressed.

Sometimes leaving everything you know is a dangerous act. Sometimes staying with everything you know is a dangerous act.

Conocimientos is about building trust by sharing about who we really are and where we’ve really been.³ Only then can we truly know where it is we need to go together.

What would it take for you to be ready to leave everything and step into the unknown?

The iconic stories of disciples leaving everything behind to follow Jesus in scripture come to us in a variety of ways. Mark tells the story only a few verses in to his gospel. Jesus is still a relative unknown and those who left their livelihoods had very little to go on.

But Luke’s story not only has some variation in content from Mark, it appears in the narrative in a way that is unique to the story Luke tells. By the time Jesus gets to Simon Peter and the others in Luke’s Gospel, cleaning and folding their nets after a long and unsuccessful night of fishing, Jesus already has a reputation.

Crowds are following him—pressing in on him—trying to get close to him, trying to see him, to hear what he is saying. Before we get to chapter 5 in Luke, Jesus has been healing people left and right—every time people bring someone who needs healing,

he just does it. He even healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. He cast out demons that, upon being cast out, call out to Jesus "you are the Son of God."

Remember last week, Luke's version of Jesus reading the scripture in his hometown faith community –and igniting them with his proclamation that God's grace extends to all nations. They ran him out of town with the intention of hurling him over the cliff.

Jesus had a reputation. He was stirring things up. People were taking notice. But up until this time in Luke, Jesus had been pretty much working alone—attracting crowds, but no community around him to speak of. Luke transitions the wonders of Jesus' works and word into a movement that birthed a new family of faith.

And Jesus comes to regular everyday people doing regular every day things. He comes into their space—into Simon Peter's boat, out into the waters they have been fishing in and teaches them about trust and God's abundance.

What did it take for Simon Peter and his co-workers to leave everything and follow Jesus? And what did it take for Jesus to embrace the idea that creating a beloved community that was on the move was the most world-changing thing he could do?

God calls out to each one of us. And for each of us to leave and follow, there is something we must say goodbye to in order to take that step.

Knowing what to lay down, takes knowing what is holding you back from being who God calls you to be in the world.

Is it pride? Is it fear? Is it self-loathing or loneliness or just being stuck? Is it a body that has too many aches and pains to think about much else? Is it responsibilities that seem to suck the energy out of your sense of possibility? Is it an unhealthy home life or relationships that are not safe? Is it the way you've learned to survive? Or is it your comfort with the way things are or your resistance to change?

Have you let Jesus step into your space enough for him to teach you, to show you, to invite you to see that your life can be transformed, too?

Today our community comes together to celebrate stories of God's claim and call in our lives. We are honoring particular stories of Christ's invitation to leave and follow. New leaders are emerging in our family of faith—stepping into new roles, new calls, signaling their willingness to reprioritize, to learn, to stand up, and to step out.

And God's call to these siblings in Christ includes an invitation for something to be laid down, something to be left behind. Each one of us must prayerfully discern what it is that needs laying down to allow us to truly be free to go where this new leg of our journey together is taking us.

And today our community also celebrates the promise of a young life just beginning his journey in our midst. Roby's baptism is about the present moment—and the promises we make to trust that God's abundance shows up in every life, before we can do anything for ourselves.

Someday God will ask Roby to leave and follow—because every one of us is called to do the same. And he will carry in his story this faith community who is helping to shape him even now.

Transformation is a dynamic reality—it doesn't happen from stasis or from stubborn clinging to things that trivialize our relationships with each other and with God.

Our resistance to laying down the thing that diminishes us impacts our whole community. And our courage to finally lay it down strengthens the whole community.

You and I are not leaving and following simply for you or for me, it is for us. It is for the world.

Our community's boldness will directly flow from the boldness of each of us, from the faith that is modeled and embodied by this priesthood of all believers. God's abundance will shine through where we find the courage to leave and follow.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a queer activist, feminist, and poet of the Chicana movement believed the process of *conocimiento* happened in stages—stages of story telling, of self discovery, of healing of our whole selves, and of seeing our story in the bigger human story.⁴

She lived and wrote of the pain of living on the borders, of having to be a bridge between the cultures she held in her body, of being simultaneously home and in exile.

Anzaldúa's powerful call to the world was all about the ways we have to know ourselves and others deeply, we have to be able to forgive ourselves and others deeply, and we must be transformed by relationships, by grief, and by dreams of a better world.

Conocimiento begins in pain, in a major life change, in some breaking point—in some situation of rupture that forces us to look deeply into our own identities and reevaluate how we are in relationship with one another and with ourselves.

We lay down the parts of our life that are stagnant, that turn us against ourselves. For Anzaldúa, *conocimiento*, deep knowing that builds community, begins in the willingness to leave and unfolds into the readiness to follow a new path guided by a vision of a better world.

What would it take for us to leave and follow?

Anzaldúa wrote, “The survival of the human species depends on each of us connecting to our neighbors whether they live across the street, across national borders, or across oceans.”⁵

“... We can transform our world by imagining it differently, dreaming it passionately via all of our senses, and willing it into creation.”⁶

This, Grace Covenant, is where we learn to step up and to step out. This is where we kindle the courage to let go, to leave what diminishes us and follow a savior who sees how much more we can be and do. This is where we dream passionately of a world transformed and work together to will it into creation.

There are many reasons to leave and follow--stories of courage, stories of fear, stories of no other options, stories of new beginnings, stories of hopes and dreams, and stories of nothing to lose.

But no matter the story, embedded in the impulse to lay down a past that is life diminishing and step into a future we will ourselves to trust, is the coaxing and calling of a generous, mysterious Spirit that says—I have better plans for you. Follow me.

Thanks be to God.

¹ <https://genesisofexodusfilm.com>

² Definition of *Conocimiento* from World Trust guide on the Healing Justice documentary. Healing Justice was the other documentary used in the PART/CST class in Fall 2018. “***Conocimiento, or Practicing Unity***, is a principle of the Chicano movement for transformation and equity, recognizes that common unity begins with the process of shared awareness and *understanding* of our respective strengths, or *conocimiento (knowing)*. It emphasizes the necessity of consciously creating community within the group to heighten the potential for personal growth and shared action. Increased bonding and trust in the group can lead to deeper sharing, greater insights, increased commitment to action, and the inspiration of feeling that you are greater than one person – you are part of a larger community.”

³ Vargas, Roberto, *Family Activism* (2008) Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, CA. <https://world-trust.org>

⁴ <http://borderlandslafrontera.tumblr.com>

⁵ Keating, Ana Louise, editor. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. (Duke University Press, 2009), 312.

⁶ *Ibid.*