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*Luke 5:1-11*

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

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*Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;*

*he, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.*

In 1757 these words were penned by a 20-year old English man named Robert Robinson. He, like all of us, knew a thing or two about “wandering from the fold of God.” Orphaned at a young age, he wandered the streets of London with a rough crowd. Once he and his friends came across a fortune teller woman and forced her to drink alcohol and predict their futures. She gave a premonition that set him on edge but didn’t fully deter his predilection for debauchery.

Not long after, he and his friends heard that the famous Methodist preacher George Whitfield would be in town and they decided to attend his revival not as good faith listeners but as trouble-making hecklers.

As it turns out, I graduated in 2006 from Northwest *Whitfield* High School, named after none other than the very preacher whose sermon lit a fire in the soul of Robert Robinson. Upon listening to that feisty evangelical preacher, Robert committed his life to Jesus Christ and penned the words of “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” to express his gratitude for God having “*sought [him] like a stranger / wandering from the fold of God.*”

Over the more than 250 years since it was written, “Come Thou Fount” has solidified its place in the canon of what I like to call “Bread n’ Butter Hymns.” It is in the vast majority of English hymnals because of its enduring capability to speak so beautifully to the vulnerable places of our soul that rest in the goodness and grace of God’s mercies. Because of that, “Come Thou Fount” will be a companion for us throughout this Lenten journey; each worship service between now and the Sunday after Easter will be themed around a portion of its lyrics.

I draw your attention to the logo for our Lenten theme: Wandering Heart. You’ll notice a map of sorts, with a path that is anything but linear. Across that pathway you’ll see a series of icons, each representing a different worship service between now and Easter. And each of those services will be themed by a different lyric of “Come Thou Fount.” A few days ago, on Ash Wednesday, we began the season of Lent by talking about the ways we can “Tune our hearts” to sing God’s grace. Appropriately, the logo for that service was a tuning fork. And today, we sing with the joy of Robert Robinson of those moments when Jesus sought us as strangers, and is indeed still seeking us to this day. Today’s logo is the fish; a homage to the familiar story of the calling of the first disciples.

Which brings us to our second companion for this Lenten journey. If we are journeying through Lent with the voice of “Come Thou Fount,” so too are we traveling this road through the eyes of Peter.

As Sanctified Art puts it, “Peter had a wandering heart. Jesus was always there to catch Peter, to walk beside him, to wash his feet, and to offer love. In Peter’s story, we find Jesus. Peter’s wandering faith ebbed and flowed, pushed away and pulled close. But he was always tethered to the love of God. This Lent, we’re joining Peter in figuring out faith. We will wander alongside him, glimpsing Jesus through his eyes.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

We know many things about Peter, more so than pretty much any other disciple. We know he was a fisherman. We know he was married. We know that he was head-strong and eager; usually the first of the disciples to open his mouth (which sometimes benefited him…and sometimes not so much!). Last week we heard him babbling on the mountain at the Transfiguration. We’ll observe him walk on water, and sink. We’ll see him succeed, and fail. We’re hear him call Jesus messiah, and then deny. We see each of us in him because Peter is just so…human.

In today’s story, I find the most “human” moment to be the one when Peter reacts to the miraculous catch of fish. He could have responded to this unbelievable gift in one of any number of ways.

Ann Lamott summarizes the essence of prayer in three words: help, thanks, wow. Peter could have said, “Help! Help me understand what’s happening and what it means for my life.” Peter could have said, “Thanks! Thank you for this gift! Thank you for saving my life, my livelihood, my family.” Or Peter could have said, “Wow,” and adopted the human response to the unfathomable by simply standing in awe.

But Peter did none of that. He didn’t say “help,” “thanks,” or “wow.” Instead, he says, “get away from me.”

And *that’s* the part of this passage that *gets me.* Peter would be a pretty bland character if his response had simply been, “Cool. Let’s go!” But it wasn’t. In his response, urging Jesus to leave him, Peter joins the lexicon of characters in the Bible who reacted to God doing something incredible in their lives by *running as far away from it as they can as fast as they can!*

I don't know if Jesus wore a Fitbit or a smart watch but, boy, if he did he sure would have gotten his steps in seeking Peter. He sure gets his steps in seeking every one of us! It was tradition back in the day for Jewish religious leaders to set up camp somewhere and have their students come to them. But Jesus was a different kind of religious leader. He sought *them*. He went *to them*. He comes *to us.* He seeks us out with the same ferocity as that goodness and mercy that pursues us all the days of our lives in Psalm 23.

And, for many of us, that’s *terrifying!* I wonder if Robert Robinson felt that way after accosting that fortune teller or heckling George Whitfield upon his tree stump pulpit. “What has gotten hold of me? What, like a fetter, has bound itself to my wandering heart?”

We gather, friends, at the beginning of this Lenten journey, as wandering hearts. And I want us to be clear that when we use the word “wandering” over the next 40(ish) days, we do not do so with judgmental tones. Yes, wandering has often been a term to describe wanton behavior that is hurtful, dangerous, or sinful. It has often been used to describe characters like the prodigal son, or Jonah, both of whom deliberately ran from God and who God was calling them to be and do.

However, wandering can also be used to describe a very natural part of what it means to be human. Wandering can actually be where we find ourselves and where God finds us. The Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness for forty years was *not* a punishment for bad behavior; it was a training ground to receive God’s mercies.

This Lent, we will wander with Peter. And today we’re reminded that Jesus sought him and his fellow fisherman not that they would be sole recipients of God’s mercies; but that they would be vehicles to share that mercy with others. Maybe that’s why Peter tried to run from it; because he knew instinctively that this miracle was more than a short-term reprieve from his financial struggles. He knew that this was the beginning of a journey that would require of him more than he was comfortable with.

As the Hobbit Bilbo once said to his beloved nephew: “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you’ll be swept off to.”

Peter knew he was about to get swept off his feet. So did Robert Robinson. And, like both of them, it’s ok to take a moment to fall on our knees and say, “God, get away from me!” But then there comes a time to put on our favorite traveling cloak, grab our trusty walking stick, and get to wandering.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God’s wandering hearts, say: **Amen**.

1. Words by Dr. Terence Lester via bible commentary of A Sanctified Art. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)