

From Nobody to Somebody to Everybody

Today's gospel story has a lot to say about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

It starts out with nobodies who become somebodies, who, with the grace of God, step into the shoes of everybody.

Allow me to explain.

Jesus first calls Peter and John, Andrew and James.

They are, in the eyes of the world, and in their own eyes, nobodies.

They still live at home!

Their job?

It's the family fishing business!

Their future?

Well, it looks exactly like their past.

Like I said, nobodies.

Jesus walks by and seems to provide, if not a solution, then at least a diversion from the life they seem destined to live.

So off they go, leaving two dear old dads to fend for themselves in the fishing business, as two sets of brothers set off to see what might be up with this strange fellow from Nazareth.

In Mark's gospel, the one we shall be reading from all year, it doesn't take long for amazing things to happen.

Suddenly, this quiet stranger from Nazareth is casting out demons and healing people who are sick, and he's attracting quite a crowd.

Mark tells us that the whole city comes out to see him.

And I ask you, what effect will that have on these nobodies named Peter and Andrew, James and John?

How do you expect them to react when they find themselves as the road crew for the newest rockstar in town?

How does anyone cope with going from being a nobody to being a somebody?

I'll tell you!

They get swelled heads and big ideas, that's what happens!

They start thinking about opening a version of Disney World, only maybe call it Healing World, with Jesus front and center!

In my law practice days, I represented some guys in their 20's who hit it big during the dot com bubble in the mid 1990's.

They made millions on a single stock.

Before they found this pot of gold, one fellow was a prison guard, and the others were just working stiffs.

So how did they react to their sudden transformation from nobodies to somebodies in a country that worships money?

Well, they began to put on airs, they talked as if every word they uttered should be preserved for all time, they spoke with high falootin' accents, and they treated lesser mortals with contempt.

Until, that is, the stock collapsed, and their millions turned to zeros, and they were back where they started; a painful journey from nobody to somebody — back to nobody.

I tell you that story because today, these friends of Jesus are finding themselves in a similar place.

From lowly fishermen, they are now the pals of a guy who's doing miracles; and word about these fantastic goings-on is spreading like wildfire.

And what happens?

Jesus leaves.

He goes to the deserted places to pray — in the dark.

When Mark talks about deserted places he means places of great struggle — and when it's dark in those places — the struggle is especially difficult.

The rockstar has gone away and his friends panic.

They "hunt" for him, which in the original Greek, really means that they're furious with him.

They've "hunted" for him because the rockstar left town without warning and the people who are expecting a show are now standing around muttering with disappointment.

These friends of Jesus want him back on stage.

They want the show to continue.

They've enjoyed their time in the limelight.

Once you become a somebody, it's really hard to go back to being a nobody.

In these early days of following Jesus, these new followers don't have a clue about what's coming - they don't have a clue about where the road to discipleship leads.

Which is why, as they "hunt" for him, Mark calls Peter and John and Andrew and James not disciples, but the "companions" of Jesus.

Because companions are people who are along for the ride, while disciples are students trying to learn something new.

In these early days with Jesus, these first followers are merely companions, and that companionship continues for a good part of Jesus' public ministry.

It won't be long before we hear two of them arguing about who is the greatest and about Peter telling Jesus that he's got no business talking about winding up on the cross.

Yes, there are many lessons to be learned on this journey of making disciples out of mere companions.

And I have to say, thank God these first followers struggle like this; because their struggle gives us room to struggle too, as we try to wrap our heads around the upside down nature of God, one who finds wisdom

in what we call lunacy, one who is strong in what to us looks like abject weakness.

So here stands Jesus, confronted by his disappointed handlers as they urge him to go back to town and start the show again.

Jesus refuses to go back to the circus.

"We're off to other places," he says, "the kingdom is not a side show and I'm not here to make every sick person well.

I'm here to preach the kingdom, a place where life is not about nobodies becoming somebodies, but a life where everybody can come to know their true identity, their true destiny."

And this is where we pick up with Paul's letter today.

Because Paul has discovered that true discipleship means moving from being a nobody to a somebody to indeed becoming — everybody.

Is your head hurting yet?

But that's exactly what he's saying today.

That even though he was once a nobody, he has become a somebody because he is the last apostle — knocked on his backside by Jesus.

But Paul recognizes that being a somebody is not where it's at.

Where it's at is slowly learning the painful, ego-shattering, self-surrendering task of becoming all things to all people.

Meaning: waking up each day with a commitment to put myself in the shoes of every person I meet; to try my best to see the world through

their eyes, and thus move out of my own way, taking off my own blinders.

Meaning: one who is used to being served learns how to serve, and one who is used to being in charge learns how to take orders, and one who is used to being put down finds herself raised up and one who is used to hatred finds out what it's like to be loved.

"For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them," Paul says to us today.

"To the Jews I become a Jew, in order to win Jews.

To those under the law, I bow to the law, to win those under the law.

To those outside the law, I stand outside the law, to win those outside the law.

To the weak, I am weak, in order to win the weak.

I have become all things to all people, that I might, by all means, save some."

We live in times that adore fame and money and power.

It's no small irony that today is the high holy day of our secular nation: Super Sunday, where hype and hyperbole rule the day, as grown men throw themselves at each other and the merchants of Madison Avenue use every opportunity to sell us the latest must-have doohickey.

Jesus invites us into another place.

He invites us into a way of life that if practiced, slowly allows each and every one of us to catch a glimpse of the face of God in every single human being.

That by letting go of our own needs and desires, our own need to be **somebody**, we can enter into the great mystery that allows us, at long last, to see the truth: that we belong to everybody.

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