

Foolish Faith  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

What is the last thing you tried when the risk of probable failure was high?

I joined a soccer team in graduate school. Our seminary team was called the Holy Rollers, and we played against the med school, the law school, the nursing school, the business school, and the people who were getting their Ph.D.s. The thing is, I had never played soccer in my life, besides when elementary school P.E. cycled through it for a week once a year. And it showed. The other thing is, though God may have been on the side of the seminarians, that never meant that we won against the other graduate teams— especially not the business school. They were *cutthroat* competitive!

But we still had fun. It provided a shared experience and bonding, as well as a physicality that complemented our 8 am bible classes, which were also deeply challenging but in a brainy kind of way.

I'm not sure what could have possibly made fishermen like Simon and Andrew to go from casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee to follow Jesus. He had invited them, saying, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people." I am trying to compare following this unusual man— whom some called a prophet, others the Messiah, and still others a fraud— to the occupation of fisherman. It's a simple job. You may not know what the wind will bring, or if the fish will bite. But at the end of the day, you sleep in your family home. You know what to expect of the boat. You know the vendors in the market who will sell your fish. You know what kind of fish sells the best, and what time of morning the fish are friskiest. You probably learned this trade from a master fisher, maybe someone in your family who passed it down to you. It's a reliable trade to pass down to your loved ones too. It's not glamorous, and at the end of the day, you smell. But it's an honest living, and it won't get you into trouble.

On the other hand, the fishers could follow Jesus. They would be at the mercy of whoever wants to house them, whoever is willing to feed them. They would start to build a reputation, from hanging out with tax collectors and sinners, treating women with more equality, and that's going to raise eyebrows. They would leave their family, leave their jobs, and trust that the people they meet along the way will become family to them, and trust that day to day they will have enough— but only enough, and not more than that. The reputation thing could come back to haunt them. Already, John the Baptist, who had been pushing the boundaries, even from the wilderness, had been arrested. Are you really willing to stand against the common practices of culture and family, of empire and establishment?

Simon and Andrew, and James and John after them, chose to leave what they new behind, and follow where Jesus led, and live as he lived. I wonder if they knew ahead of time how risky it would be— that the very one they followed would be crucified in the ways empire executes people. I wonder if they knew their lives would be threatened too.

Paul says that the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Some could argue it is a foolish thing to follow Jesus. If I were on a discernment committee listening to Andrew and Simon weigh whether they will continue in their humble but honest work as fishermen, or follow this strange prophet who might be the Messiah, without knowing all the story of Christianity, I wonder if I'd advise them to keep on fishing. Wouldn't it be foolish to do otherwise?

But there is some kind of **charge** to what they experienced that day with Jesus.

Yesterday we held a spiritual, half-day retreat with the leaders of the church. We considered the word CHARGE, and what that means in their called positions as elders and Deacons of the church. When they were installed and ordained, they were given a charge. I asked them what that meant: the answers were varied: "CHARGE!! As in, Full speed ahead!" "Charge, like credit, as in using a credit card" another said. "Charge means holding the responsibility of the care of someone or something else." "Charge can mean an electric current, power and energy."

As we talked more, I could hear that these Elders and Deacons experience a sense of charge, both in the weight of responsibility for what they do, but also in the power and energy they get and give in serving. That power, that energy, comes from the Holy Spirit activating the gifts they have for the service of the church.

I suspect that Simon and Andrew felt some kind of charge the day they went to follow Jesus in discipleship to him. I invited our Elders and Deacons to share more personally today with the congregation, how do they experience that charge? Was it foolishness to follow when called? I was excited when four people volunteered to speak— not only because that would give me a break from the sermon in a week when this pastor has had lots of other kinds of church work— but also because it's such a blessing for you to hear from one another what it is like to follow in service to the church and to Jesus. We decided we would spread out these testimonies, so you can hear from people several times during the year. Today, we are going to hear from Jonathan.