

Beyond the Familiar

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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In our second reading today, St. Paul says, “for the world in its present form is passing away.” The idea of the world passing away is a scary thing to think about. If you watch or read Sci-Fi, you know the feeling afterwards of having to reorient yourself to the world by affirming that it is still the ground beneath your feet. Yet, what St. Paul is telling us is that even the world, at least how we know it, won’t last forever. The world itself is always in a state of change.

Russ Hudson, an author and expert in human personality types, noted in a recent article that as he travels the world, he has noticed one thing that almost all people have in common, regardless of their culture, race, religion, or economic position. He says that it is “the fear of the unknown and the need to hold onto what is familiar.” He continues, “while a certain amount of mystery and adventure may be fun for a while, most people do not prefer ongoing *ambiguity*. We like to *believe* that we know how things are and where things are, and when we do not, we often feel lost and frightened.” (*Liminality and the Holy Ideas of the Enneagram*, Oneing Vol. 8 No. 1, 69) All of us, even those who are more daring, do not like to go beyond that which is familiar to us. Ambiguity makes us uneasy.

Here comes the uncomfortable truth: Leaving behind the familiar is essential to following Jesus.

In today's Gospel, we might not grasp the severity of Jesus' call to Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Jesus was not just asking them to worship him or believe in him. He was asking them to follow him. They did. The Gospel account says, "they abandoned their nets and followed him." The nets in this Gospel passage are significant. They represent the disciples' entire world- their livelihood, their source of income, their profession, their relationships, and their way of life. They were their safety nets. When they chose to follow Jesus, they had to choose to abandon those nets and leave their familiar world behind. James and John even had to leave their father behind in the boat when Jesus called them.

Later in his article, Russ Hudson says, "the spiritual journey is precisely a journey beyond the familiar world." (70) This is a perfect summary of the point of today's Gospel and homily. In our lives as Christians, we will be asked probably not just once, but many times to move beyond our familiar world. By nature, we will resist each time. Each time, it will feel like we are calling into question too much of what we already believe. It will feel like we are abandoning our loyalties. It will feel like we are exposing our weaknesses. But by grace, we can step out in faith. We can step out physically, emotionally, and spiritually and not be afraid to step into the present moment, with all of its ambiguity. *Following Jesus means leaving the familiar behind over and over and over again.*

What has become my familiar world and do I really need to stay in that world? In this world that is passing away, there are no destinations, only rest stops. Jesus keeps moving. If we want to follow him, we must keep moving, too.