

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

I want to begin with a disclaimer. I will not be spending much time with the first half of our Gospel reading. If this story sounds familiar, it's because we heard the Lukan version of this story back in February. The setting in the narrative of Jesus' life is different between Luke and John, but it is the same tale of a miraculous catch of fish...and you may recall that I only have one fishing story and you heard it then. So, we're going to leave that part of the story alone for today.

We have this Easter season's last of the resurrection appearances this morning. Along with the disciples, we meet Jesus on the beach where he eats with them and calls them away from the tomb into what's next. The call is particularly focused on Peter as he sits with Jesus around a charcoal fire and commits to loving Jesus three times – echoing the charcoal fires in Pilate's courtyard where Peter **denied** Jesus three times. Jesus makes it very clear that the love he is asking of Peter is a love that comes with a compulsion to respond. Jesus makes it very clear that loving him means taking care of others. Loving Jesus means following him. This post-resurrection moment is about calling Peter and the other disciples to live out the path they have been formed to follow.

For the past year of my Navy ministry, I have been supporting the work of Marine Corps Recruit Depot – Parris Island. I have the privilege of stepping into that work for just a few days at a time to offer what I can to the young men and women who have answered a call to serve their country. It doesn't take much time with these recruits to learn that there are many reasons they have made that decision. There is nearly always an element of service to a higher cause – as best as they can understand it – but the reason that call brings them to that particular place and the specific mission of the Marine Corps, is not always so clearly understood.

What is very clear, crystal clear, is that answering the call to serve as a Marine brings them to their breaking point – in truth far beyond that breaking point. Answering that call requires these young people to give up **nearly** their entire identity to become something new – something they hope they can be, something they dream they can be, something they aren't entirely sure they can be.

I've walked along side them from the very beginning – seeing them on Training Day 1 – 5 days after they arrive at the depot and start the hard process of being forged from what they were into what they will be. I've looked into their petrified faces as they stand in front of Drill Instructors and Senior Drill Instructors who are not known to be...patient. Not known to be...forgiving.

But those DIs and SDIs, those carefully selected and trained experienced Marines are put in the position of shepherding those recruits on a twelve-week process of going from civilian to Marine. And it is a journey of nonstop stress from Training Day 1 to about Training Day 70, when they are handed the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor to wear – a symbol that they've earned a **new** identity. They are now a United States Marine.

It's a very compressed and challenging process that takes them from a hopeful raw recruit to a brand-new understanding that will be the foundation of everything that they will do in their Marine Corps career, and for the rest of their lives.

For those Marine recruits, the process teaches them to recognize and hold onto that call to a higher purpose. Whether they knew it or not when they got on and off that bus that brought them to yellow footprints on a road, they were answering a call. They were being formed for a particular vocation with lofty ideals and higher expectations.

That call to be a Marine is **not** the same as the call to discipleship, but I use it this morning as an analogy for what it says about our call; we are formed, we are forged by our experiences to do the work that God has called us to do. I'm not talking about your job – necessarily. I'm talking about what God has asked each one of us to do.

That's why I started this sermon on the beach with Peter. After Easter, after the true reality of the Messiah is revealed to the disciples, Peter's commitment is renewed, Jesus once again calls them to follow.

On the road to Damascus, in the middle of Saul's journey that began with hate-filled and murderous intent, Jesus shows up in the blinding light to bring a faith-filled Jewish Pharisee to his knees; to bring him to a breaking point so that he can see a new calling.

The purpose is very different, but I see the Marine recruit in this story of Saul – not yet Paul, not yet commissioned by God and the church to spread the gospel far and wide. This man was doing everything he thought he should be doing to follow the God of his people. He was simply trying to follow the law...but was brought to his knees by that same God, in the person of Jesus, to be re-formed, re-imagined, into the prolific disciple he would be.

On that road, blinded by the light, struck helpless by God's power so that he could be rebuilt by a new community, by Ananias; by the followers of the Way – the very ones he had been persecuting and helping to kill. Saul would become a new missionary – still Jewish, still living with the Law that God had given him – but forged now by a new understanding of who he really was.

Formed now, by the work of God's revelation and the community of the early church to seek a different way of following, a different calling, Saul begins the work that God asked of him – proclaiming the world to be saved by grace, no longer divided by ethnicity or social status, no longer captive to death through the law, no longer subject to the whims of earthly power.

We might not have been struck blind on the road, but we, like Paul, are claimed and formed in the waters of baptism to be disciples. To be shepherds. To this calling to be followers of Jesus.

I know that the training of Marines has changed over the years. I've heard the stories. I know too that no one who steps on those yellow footprints understands just how profoundly they will be re-formed into something new. The scales of their life experiences hide what will come of their decision.

In this Easter season, it's worth considering how we are being formed into what God has called us to be. Perhaps with a little less yelling; perhaps with a little more grace; perhaps with a different definition of "creature comforts" than offered by the swamps of South Carolina.

We come to this place not to simply hear some old stories and spend an hour singing and praying together. We come to this place to fall to our knees on the road and wait for the scales to be removed from our eyes so that we can follow where Jesus leads. That's our call. That's what God asks of us. Amen.