

**An Address given by The Rt. Rev. James T. Magness,
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to the Diocese of Dallas Brotherhood of St. Andrew Assembly (120211)
at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Garland, TX**

Having spent a large portion of my life wearing a military uniform, I am no stranger to being ordered into action for a mission. By and large the people of the organizations I served loved being called into action - sometimes at a moment's notice. The payoff for the tedium of seemingly endless training and practicing is the call to action. Ostensibly, the training and practicing prepare you for what will be required when the call to action comes - but you never really know what will be required of you until you get to the ultimate destination.

I want to read to you, to jog your memory, the beginning - if you will - the inauguration of mission within the family of the followers of Christ.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

As... (Jesus) walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

-Matthew 4:18-22 (NRSV)

This is, of course, the calling of the first four disciples, one of whom was Andrew, whose response to Jesus' call is the basis for the Brotherhood of St. Andrew. Jesus' words to these disciples were as significant for what Jesus did NOT say to them as it was for what Jesus did say.

- Jesus didn't say, "Go back to the village and tell your mother goodbye."
- Jesus didn't say, "Pack a bag with lots of clothing."
- Jesus didn't say, "Here is a map that will tell you exactly where we are going."
- Jesus didn't say, "I'll have you back home by Passover."

Teasing out the nuances of this story, we can discover some of the very real characteristics, or marks, of what it means and what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus; followers who live out their baptismal vows upon the high seas of life with Jesus. From this scripture I want to point out at least three of these characteristics:

The first characteristic of Jesus' followers is that they KNOW THEY ARE CHOSEN. There was no confusion about who Jesus was telling to get up and follow him. Hey, I'm talking to you. In this story, Jesus is a straight talker, totally ambiguous about the call.

A second characteristic of the followers of Christ is that THEY ARE WILLING TO LEAVE EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW JESUS. As I said earlier, the first disciples had no time to turn back and become concerned with what they had left behind. Their focus was upon Jesus and not what they owned or who they knew or even their close ties to family relations. In the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament there is a conversation between Jesus and some would-be followers. One of the wannabes said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'" [Luke 9:61-62 (NRSV)]. When you commit yourself to being upon the high seas of life with Jesus, there is no time to look back.

A third characteristic of the followers of Christ is that they ACCEPT THE URGENCY OF FOLLOWING JESUS. When I read and hear the stories of the four fishermen, I am struck that the act of following Jesus was immediate. When Jesus called them, at that very moment they got up and went. Jesus' call of these men was in the moment and called for an immediate response. Simon and Andrew, when called out by Jesus, immediately left their fishing nets and went with Jesus.

The call of these disciples is the same call that we hear, read, and to which we say "yes" in our baptismal covenant. The call of these first disciples, the first documented followers of Jesus, is in what we call in the military a forward environment. It is an environment not unlike the environment where I spent the majority of my adult life: aboard Navy ships that put out to sea in deep blue water - and did it often. There is an old adage that Navy ships and Sailors belong in one place: at sea. Yet, you can't stay at sea forever. Sooner or later Navy ships and Sailors have to go into port: to refuel and resupply; to do any necessary repairs; perhaps members of the crew need to go to schools for training; and to take time to give rest to crew. There is a necessity for both the time spent in home port and the life at sea. One exists to serve and support the other. Yet, when I compare this analogy of ship home-port and ship at-sea time to the community and fellowship of God's people, I cannot help but notice that there appears to be, in most Christian fellowships a strong preference for the home port over life at sea. Through the centuries followers of Christ have been eager to not only invest much of their time, energy, and resources in maintaining their home port, but have done so to the gradual exclusion a focus upon life at sea. When Jesus first called the disciples, as soon as they said their "yes" to him they were called to leave everything behind - to get up from their occupations and preoccupations and go - go in search of people. Jesus bid them to go as quickly as they could into the deep waters and find people who who had needs and who would be his followers.

On the other hand Jesus did not tell the disciples to go down to the local rock quarry, get some stone, mix up some mortar and construct a building. No, serving people was on Jesus' mind.

Over two decades ago an Episcopal priest by the name of Loren Mead wrote about this in a book called *The Once and Future Church*. Loren described congregations as the home ports with the purpose of supporting those who went to sea. Loren said that those who are sent out to sea - are out following Jesus - are doing the primary work of Christian mission:

- proclaim the good news of the gospel
- heal the sick
- feed the hungry
- clothe the naked
- visit the prisoners and widows, and
- stand up to the forces of this world who hurt those who cannot care for themselves.

Do any of you doubt that this is hard work? Hardly. Though the mission of being a Christ-follower can be summed up by the commitment to ministry away from home port and following Jesus, the reality is that a disciple cannot stay out upon the deep blue waters for ever. Disciples need a home port. The home port exists to support, and give rest and refreshment to those engaged in mission plying the deep waters of life.

Have you ever spent any time in Salt Lake City? Of course Salt Lake City is the headquarters for the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. I have always been impressed by the organizational order of the LDS and their magnificent buildings. In American religion, I don't know of few religious groups that can compare to what the LDS have done in Salt Lake City.

However, when you think of LDS folk, most of you don't think of large and orderly structures in Salt Lake City. More often than not, you think of young people going out in pairs, riding their bicycles and proclaiming their message door to door. While I might be at odds with parts of the LDS message, there is something to be said for where the LDS place their emphasis: the mission.

What would it be like if we had such an emphasis; if we thought of our home ports, our congregations, as places of refreshment and renewal for the disciples from the sea? For the sake of our conversation this morning, let's say that we want to completely transform the way that we live out our lives as Christ followers. What happens next? First of all, it will be helpful to acknowledge that it is a lot easier to say we will be engaged in transformational change, than to actually make the change.

As I see it at least a couple of things need to happen. First, we need to have spiritual leaders who are totally committed to this task of transforming the emphasis of the community from expending all of our energy and resources upon maintenance of the home port- to doing all we can to maintain the ships and keep the ships - ships with our missionary disciples aboard - at sea.

This is a very demanding job for spiritual leaders. However, when some very basic leadership principles are applied, you can become the Christ-followers you need to become and do what Christ-followers need to do. We need leaders, spiritual leaders: spiritual leaders who are lay persons and spiritual leaders who are in holy orders. This will call for us to develop leaders with a different outlook about mission.

A little over a decade ago I adopted a spiritual leadership paradigm that has served me well and I want to tell you a little bit about how I learned these principles. One principle is that followers of Christ need to have a heart and a mind for the mission that has to be carried out in the deep waters...and sometimes you have to go where you don't want to go.

On the morning of September 11, 2001 I was attending a meeting at the Pentagon just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. I was a senior military chaplain engaged in a conference with my Joint Chief's counterparts when someone interrupted the meeting and said there was something we needed to see – so we got up and trooped into the next room and saw on television that an airplane had crashed into one of the twin towers. It was shocking and tragic but these people were in New York and there was nothing we could do, so we went back into our conference room to resume our meeting.

Another interruption came – another plane had hit. Now that was distressing too, but I was focused on having an argument in that meeting and I was going to win that argument. We went back into our meeting and then about 45 minutes later a fire alarm went off. We wondered if it was a drill or not but when we walked out of our conference room we smelled smoke so we thought maybe it wasn't a drill. The Pentagon is so solidly constructed that we had no hint of what had happened.

We started filing out of the building – some people milling – some running past us. We emerged out of the Pentagon Officers Athletic Club entrance and walked down next to the river where we were directed to wait. I looked behind me and saw a column of smoke and thought – so it is a fire, I thought. Then I saw a woman running by – she ran right out of her shoes and she never stopped to recover them. Then I heard someone say it wasn't a fire – a plane had flown into the building.

One of the leadership principles is to keep your focus. I had been distracted earlier but now it was clear what our focus should be. We didn't need to change our focus – sometimes you just have to change your tactics to achieve that focus. At that point we agreed that what we as chaplains should be about was helping to get hurt and injured people out of the building and to minister to them. We were directed back into the building, moving with some difficulty past the people coming out and went back in, moving through the crowd until we entered into the Pentagon Courtyard. We saw terrible carnage, people who were horribly burned, and some were beyond help. I helped some of the survivors to place some phone calls – but soon I found couldn't get to my own wife, Carolyn – the cell traffic was so slammed.

Sometimes it is important to appreciate that there is a spiritual risk to the work that you are doing that you cannot risk being distracted by it. One of our number was so shaken by what we saw that he simply could not handle it. I watched him decompensate before my eyes. At one moment we were talking – and the next he was reciting the 23rd Psalm, leaning against a tree and just slid to the ground. At first I thought there was a pastoral need I should address – but then I thought “No.” I simply haven't got the spiritual energy to engage him and continue to do what I was

doing. The best thing I could do for him was allow him to stay out of the way and continue with the work that was before us. We worked that day until about 5 pm until we were told there was really no more we could do and to go home.

The next important part of spiritual leadership is to determine your mission. How do you choose what your mission will be? One of the most basic principles of mission and evangelism is one of the simplest. Be in the right place at the right time, and be sure that you listen more than you talk. I do not believe that it was any accident that Jesus was walking along on a road beside the Sea of Galilee when he called the disciples. I tend to think that Jesus was very intentional about being at the water's edge that day.

In April 1989 I was a member of the crew - called the ships company - of the USS Enterprise (CVN-65). You may remember that like today there was a bit of controversy going on between the US and Iran about whether or not there would be free passage in the Straights of Hormuz. The US said yes, and Iran said no. In fact, Iran placed sub-surfaces explosive mines in the Straights. Earlier in that April the USS Samuel B. Roberts, a Navy ship, hit one of the mines and almost sank. The Commander in Chief decided that our battle group would respond to Iran. It was planned that on April 22, 1989 Operation Mantis, an air strike on Iranian military targets would take place.

Now based on time I had spent in Vietnam manning a 50 caliber machine gun – I think I know a little bit about combat – and so on the night before combat was to take place I thought I would make myself available where people were congregating. I was on the hangar deck which is just below the flight deck where they were hanging the 500lb laser guided bombs on the bomb racks of the aircraft. And after they'd hang them, the magic markers would appear and all sorts of endearments would be inscribed on the bombs, the specifics of which I am reluctant to share in mixed company but I'm pretty sure you can imagine. The Ayatollah Khomeini was then the leader of the country and you can guess many of these messages invited the Ayatollah to a one way trip to Hell. Anyway I watched one 3rd Class Petty Officer loading bombs and then add his message to all the others.

The attack went at dawn and it went without a hitch. 3 Iranian Navy vessels were sunk – the damage a modern 500lb bomb can do to the flimsy construction of some of their destroyers was pretty devastating. Some 600 sailors were lost with those ships. None of our folks were injured or killed and all aircraft returned safe. The next night I went back down to the hangar deck and saw this same 3rd Class Petty Officer sort of wandering aimlessly around– so I approached him. He said he heard about the sinking of 3 of their ships and asked if I supposed any sailors were hurt? I said I supposed so. He asked if I thought any of them were married with kids. I told him I thought some probably were. Then he asked what if it was one of his bombs that sank those ships? I asked him what if it was. His response was “I don't know...”

He was morally wounded. He had a fractured soul – a split soul and he needed healing. We talked and talked for hours into the night. During that conversation, I finally got the opportunity

to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with him – but only after I had intentionally placed myself where we could have a conversation in the first place - and then only after I had listened.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the mission to which our Lord calls us – I think there is no more important work and many of you are already engaged in it. I want to thank you for the mission that you engage in here in the Brotherhood of St Andrew in this diocese and this parish. I also want to thank you for allowing me to be in your midst this morning to share these few thoughts.