

...O'er the Tumult"

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
February 6, 2022
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"...o'er the tumult."

Do you find that title of my message strange? I don't often use old English, to begin with. But for a person who has struggled with attention issues all my life I relate to tumult.

Those of you, like me, who have sung hymns for many years. will know that the full phrase, the title, is...

"Jesus Calls us o'er the tumult"
...of our life's wild restless sea;
day by day his voice still calls us
saying, 'Christian, follow me.'¹

Tumult:

According to Merriam-Webster, it means, "a. Disorderly agitation or milling about of a crowd usually with uproar and confusion of voices: COMMOTION... b. a turbulent uprising."²

Is there some of that in your life? Commotion? Turbulence? Confusion of voices? Yeah, it's in my life as well. It is also in the lives of 7.7 billion people that we share this earth with.

When I was a child, there was a day that everyone took off. Stores closed. Streets were barren. Most people relaxed. There was still tumult, though. What tumult adds confusion to your life? Conflicts in your family? Social media mayhem? Watch the news and you see people doing insane things.

Jesus calls us o'er that tumult.

The hymn "Jesus Calls us o'er the Tumult" was written for St. Andrew's Day by Irish poet Cecil Frances Alexander in the 1800s. I'm guessing that that time had its tumult too. There apparently was great tumult in that time when Jesus called his disciples. The poet wrote the hymn based on the story in Matthew 14³; Jesus had just fed the five thousand. People were everywhere, and so Jesus asks the disciples to take him out in the boat into the Sea of Galilee, and a flash storm brews. The boat is tossed about, the disciples scream, and Jesus is calm.

In Luke's story of tumult, Jesus convinces the disciples to go back out in the boat after a long night with no luck fishing. He says, give it one more try – I'll go out with you. As the story goes, a great one too, there are so many fish that the boats are sinking. Peter is out of his mind. Jesus, though, is calm in the boat filled with flapping fish.

¹ VU

²

https://www.google.ca/search?q=tumult+merriam&source=lmns&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewj14NPH2uv1AhWzrXIEHWtEctYQ_AUoAHoECAEQAA

³ Bible reference



“Great Catch” by John August Swanson.
Found at www.united-church.cablogsround-tablepeters-fish-story

That exasperating teacher Jesus suggests that they shouldn't panic. Isn't it difficult to ignore what your senses tell you, to trust a voice that calmly says, "follow me" when you hardly know the guy!

There are many conflicting voices asking us to trust them today. Too many people seem to have agendas. How do we discern a call, a holy voice, in the swirl and din? There is no easy answer to that. I'm frequently experiencing tumult – noise, conflict, confusion. The thing is, though, that we can try to find quiet, meditative moments – those are important. But sometimes, it is in the *middle* of the fray, the chaos, it is in those inconvenient moments where we just don't think that we have time – it is in that chaos, maybe, that the voice of Jesus calls us o'er the tumult.

And don't for a minute doubt that you have a call. We ALL have a call, a mission, a *raison d'être* in this world. We were created unique, and wonderful and with talents. If we take this Christian adventure seriously, we will listen for the voice that beckons us to share those gifts that we were created with.

In 1997, Apple developed an ad campaign titled "Think different." The ads included the words "Here's to the unusual ones... the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square hole, the ones who see things differently... The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones that do." The images in the ad campaign included Pablo Picasso, Albert Einstein, Bob Dylan, Nelson Mandela, Amelia Earhart, and Jim Henson, to name a few. You and I, while perhaps we don't yet see it, are no lesser, no greater than these talented people.

Calls rarely consist of a voice booming into our lives. More likely, in the tumult of a typical day, comes a call. If we are listening for it, we can hear it. But we have to believe it. Believe that God has a call for you and me.

For some, many maybe, in the deafening boredom of COVID quarantine, a commercial touches me, makes me cry. *Why did that touch me?* Is a voice speaking to me?

On a terrible day, nothing seems to be going right. In the midst of it, I fly past a person standing on the side of the road. Something about that person beckons me to turn around. I do, and will be late because of it, but that person has something amazing to share if I can listen.

Soon we will be celebrating faithful stewards, the people in and around St. Andrew's who have heard calls, and answered, "Here I am!" Many ministries you will recognize, some you may not know of but might feel called to:

- People who recruit readers and musicians for worship;
- Those of you who are agreeing to greet people when we hopefully gather to worship in sanctuary in 2 weeks;
- How about the people who faithfully put out chairs and tables for coffee and tea time after worship, then stack them after;
- Or those of you who call someone who is having a hard time, calls, some of them small, but oh so important.

Confusion and pain of life can distract us, prevent us from hearing the call to care, the call to make a difference, the call to show holy love to every neighbour. Christ is in the midst of that tumult, calling us to follow. Amen.