

*Based on Mark 1:16-20. Fishing for a Movement.*

*We, as a communal species, are at a pivotal point in our human evolution.* So says Deborah Threadgill Egerton, author of *Know Justice, Know Peace: A Transformative Journey of Social Justice, Anti-Racism, and Healing through the Power of the Enneagram*.

*Our reality is changing, power dynamics are shifting, and marginalized communities are redefining their place in this world,* Threadgill Egerton says. *We are faced with the need for a critical course correction.*

That course correction is happening, Threadgill Egerton argues, but as it continues, fear and conflict inevitably ensue. The way things were is no longer the way things are, which is frightening for those of us who liked things the way they were. At the same time, the way things are becoming has not yet unfolded in its fullness, which is frightening for all of us. In the meantime, there are wars and rumors of wars raging globally and nationally and locally. And even, perhaps most importantly, for Threadgill Egerton's work, there are wars and rumors of wars raging internally within our spirits.

It feels like chaos. It is, in fact, chaotic. Like the deep chaotic waters of Genesis, in the first few sentences of the Bible. Chaotic waters over which, in some small measure of comfort, the Spirit of God swoops and hovers and broods like a mother hen, gestating, over time, a new Creation.

Jesus knows a little something of the Spirit of God swooping and hovering and brooding over the chaotic waters of a new creation, as he makes his way along the shores of Galilee in our Lesson for today. The abusive power of the Imperial State can no longer be tolerated, and in response the culture of his time is navigating civil unrest along a dangerous spectrum: armed religious nationalist resistance on the one hand, exemplified by the nationalist Zealots of his time; passive acquiescence and even collusion on the other hand, exemplified by the temple authorities of his time.

Neither of these polar opposite responses will do. Into the civil unrest of his time, Jesus preaches a third way: yes, we resist and even overturn abusive power and the imperial theology that sustains abusive power, but we do it through non-violent, radical love instead of violent rebellion.

It is not entirely clear that Simon and Andrew and James and John have any real sense of this Way of Jesus they are leaving their nets and their boats to follow. We are not given a motive, although we can surmise from the context and the culture that they perceive the preaching of Jesus to be a judgment on the rich and powerful, and they agree with that judgment. The heavily symbolic phrase *fishers of men* is lifted directly from the prophets Jeremiah and Amos, who use this phrase to describe God's censure of a community that perpetuates economic and social injustice.

Even so, if there is anything that biblical scholars who study the Gospel of Mark agree on, it is the motif of the clueless disciple. Simon and Andrew, James and John, and all the rest really do not get what The Way of Jesus is really all about. Over and over again, Jesus tells them that, while they certainly cannot subscribe to the

imperial theology of the temple hierarchy colluding with abusive power, they are also emphatically not on a campaign of religious or ethnic nationalism. Instead they are cultivating a community of radical discipleship, constructing a way forward together, in the midst of the chaos, that holds forth a vision of the coming reign of God.

Over and over again, the disciples want Jesus to turn into a *strong man*<sup>1</sup> figure who will rescue them from the powers that be. Over and over again, Jesus tells them the desire for a strong man is in fact the heart of the problem. And then he demonstrates in his life and in his death how to challenge that desire both inwardly and outwardly.

This is our work, too, as a community, in our pivotal point of global, national, and congregational history. We have endured chaos, and chaos continues. We have witnessed - and perhaps even personally experienced - imperial power at its worst, with its accompanying racism and sexism, xenophobia and transphobia, not to mention gripping poverty and unrestrained militarism. As I said last week, if the world as it is currently constructed is *working for us* we have some soul searching to do, as it is emphatically not working for most of humanity, not to mention the rest of creation.

Into the civil unrest of our own time the same dynamics emerge as during the time of Jesus: some have called for - and already practiced - armed religious nationalism based on an inaccurate at best and intentionally manipulative at worst misuse of Christianity. Others have cowered in acquiescence to the injustice of our time, hoping we will just all get along while avoiding - either intentionally or in ignorance - the ways in which the world does not work for most.

In our own pivotal point of global, national, and congregational history, both Jesus and Deborah Threadgill Egerton continue to call us to a third way: resisting and even overturning abusive power through non-violent, radical love.

May we continue to sing in response, Here I Am, Lord, Send Me!

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<sup>1</sup> For more on The Way of Jesus as response to *strong man* ideology, see Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of the Story of Jesus*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 2008.