

September 14, 2014

Luke 5:1-11

Responding to Christ's Invitation

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Let's start off today with a little quiz on invitation etiquette.

1. Who knows what these four letters (RSVP) stand for?
"répondez, s'il vous plaît"
2. What do those words mean in English?
"please respond"
3. When you receive an event invitation that says RSVP, is it proper etiquette to respond only if you're attending, only if you're not attending, or either way?
either way

How many of you would say that you're really good at doing the RSVP thing, when you're invited? How many of you are honestly not so great when it comes to RSVP etiquette?

Today I want to talk with you about the most important RSVP you'll ever make. Our topic today is "Responding to Christ's Invitation." There is no little response card that you have to fill out and mail back to Jesus. The way you live your life is your response. The way you make your choices, and set your priorities, that's your response. The way you are true to your faith, the way you take a stand for the Word of God, the way you express your commitment to Christ in your daily living, that is your response.

We challenged you last week to start wrestling with the question of "What does it mean for me to be a follower of Jesus Christ?" In the weeks ahead, we're going to discuss several important answers for that question -- several different aspects of what it means for you and me to be disciples of Christ.

We start with this one today: "Responding to Christ's Invitation." And this is not an etiquette issue, is it? This is a faith issue, a trust issue, a commitment issue that so many people -- including plenty of us church-going Christians -- struggle with mightily.

In our Bible story for today, we see Simon Peter struggling with his RSVP to Jesus. I think we can all use Simon's story to self-check our own response to Christ's invitation.

Luke tells us the story. Jesus is teaching the crowds by the side of the lake. He finishes speaking, and then Jesus turns to Simon and tells him to go out into the deep water and put down his nets. What is Simon's response? Well, Simon, who's a fisherman, knows that Jesus' suggestion is all wrong. But he has a certain amount of respect for this amazing teacher and healer, since he's met Jesus once or twice, and Jesus even healed Simon's mother-in-law of a high fever. So Simon responds with a grudging, half-hearted respect. He says to Jesus, "OK, we've been working all night long and haven't caught anything. But if you say so, I'll give it a try." Simon's first response to Jesus, we could say, is ***half-hearted respect***.

That's not the worst response to Christ's invitation, is it? Maybe some of us here have this same kind of grudging respect for Jesus. You may be someone who doesn't know too much about Jesus yet. Maybe you aren't quite sure what you believe about Jesus; but you kind of like what he stands for, and you're drawn to him in some way. You're not fully committed to Jesus, but you have this ***half-hearted respect*** for him -- and that's OK.

And maybe there are some of us here who have been part of the Christian scene for so long that we're just going through the motions. Maybe your response to Jesus used to be

passionate and whole-hearted; but now, to be honest, it's a half-hearted response. "Do I believe in Jesus? Sure. Worship Jesus? Yeah. Am I following Jesus? I guess so." That happens to a lot of Christians. And, if that's you, I'm not judging you; but I'm challenging you to think long and hard about your response to Jesus.

Let's look at Simon Peter's next response. He and his partners do what Jesus says. They suddenly land this huge catch of fish -- so many that their boats are sinking. Simon realizes right away that it's Jesus who is making this miracle happen. He's overwhelmed, suddenly aware that he's in the presence of divine power, in the presence of God himself. So Simon falls down at Jesus' feet, scared; and he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

What an incredible response! Simon is weak, mortal, sinful, and unholy. Jesus is powerful, divine, sinless, and holy. Simon grasps, in this moment, that Jesus is God. He responds to Christ with **fearful self-awareness**. "I am so not worthy of you, Jesus," he's saying. "I know that I don't deserve to be in your presence."

How long has it been since you've responded to Jesus in that same way? Have you ever responded like that? I think every Christian has to get down on his/her knees once in a while, and be brutally honest about who Jesus is, and who we are.

Do you realize that Jesus is truly God? Do you believe in his divinity, his omnipotence, his perfection? He may have never made hundreds of fish jump into your boat when you're out on Falls Lake or Kerr Lake; but, if you're sitting in this church today believing that Jesus really is God, then you have good reason to feel guilt and fear in his presence, like Simon did.

You and I have good reason to respond to Jesus with **fearful self-awareness**, too.

Because you and I are not worthy of Jesus, either! You and I do not deserve to be in Christ's presence, any more than Simon did. Our sins and our misdeeds are appalling to Jesus. They convict us, and they make us stand in stark, glaring contrast to who Jesus really is. "Depart from me, Lord," we ought to respond, "for I am a sinful man, a sinful woman, a sinful youth, a sinful child. Depart from me, Lord."

But notice, in our story, Jesus doesn't depart from Simon Peter; and he doesn't depart from sinners like us, either. The Lord reassures Simon, and then he invites him: "Do not be afraid," Jesus says, "from now on you will be catching men." And what does Simon do? What is his next response, along with his fishing partners? It says, "*They left everything and followed him*" (vs. 11). Simon's final response to Jesus is **committed action**.

Committed action -- none of us should ever doubt that Jesus is looking for that same response from us. After all, Jesus is our Savior. He's our God, and he deserves nothing less than our full commitment and our energetic action. Christ wants our whole lives to be lived in joyful, faithful, committed response to his love and his Word.

But, just like Simon Peter, we can't RSVP like that -- we can't respond with **committed action** -- until our own **fearful self-awareness** is resolved. So that's where we're going to keep our focus today. We have a lot to talk about in the weeks ahead, and we want to move toward committed action. But, for today, let's be sure that we all hear the voice of Jesus talking to us, as we begin our discipleship journey together. Listen to the Lord, reassuring you and inviting you, just as he did to Simon that day long ago. Jesus tells you today, "Don't

be afraid. I can see your sins, and I know all about your selfish thoughts, your unkind words, your unfaithful actions. But I am here for you,” Jesus says. “I have taken on myself all of your sin, and all the world’s sin; and I have paid for it all in full with my own life. I forgive you,” Jesus says, “I absolve you. And now I invite you. Follow me. Walk with me. Be my disciple. Believe in me. Commit yourself to me, and learn to put that commitment into action.”

What an incredible invitation! What’s your response?