

Opening

- There is a comic, which has been a favorite of mine since I was a child and I still read it every day, without fail. "Hagar the Horrible" is a gruff, boisterous, crude, but loveable Viking with a soft spot in his heart.
- And one of my all-time favorite Hagar episodes is when Hagar is visiting with Dr. Zook about losing weight.
 - They are seated opposite one another on two rocks, and Hagar is leaning forward towards Dr. Zook.
 - In the first three panels, Hagar is getting increasingly worked up as he says, "I gotta lose weight, Dr. Zook! You just gotta help me!! I'll do anything!"
 - Dr. Zook says, "Good!" Then, as Hagar listens attentively, still leaning in from his rock, Dr. Zook goes on to say, "I want you to go on a diet, stop drinking and get more exercise."
 - In the next panel there is silence, as Hagar ponders what he has heard.
 - Then in the last panel, Hagar again leans forward toward Dr. Zook and says, "I mean anything within reason..."
 - Hagar's heart is in the right place, he knows what he wants to do, and he wants to take action.
 - But when Dr. Zook tells him what he needs to do, Hagar wants to put some limits on his commitment to the whole process.
- In today's Gospel reading, the young man who runs up to Jesus and kneels before him wants eternal life.
 - And we might well imagine that he has said, at least to himself, "I'll do anything to have eternal life."
 - At least he impresses Jesus with the fact that since he was a child, he has kept all of the commandments in the Law.
 - Yet, when the young man hears from Jesus that he must also sell all he owns and give the money to the poor, we are told that he was shocked and went away grieving, "for he had many possessions."
 - Apparently, the young man was willing to do anything "within reason" to inherit eternal life, but that didn't include selling everything he owned.

- He put limits on his commitment, to follow Jesus.
- What about us? What does God want us to do?
 - And if we say, “I’ll do anything within reason,” what do we mean?
 - What limits do we want to put on our commitment to God?
 - And if we put limits on our commitment to God, what do we really give up?
 - What does it really cost us? <PAUSE>

The Summons

- Hymns are an important part of our worship.
 - The melodies help us create a joyful noise to the Lord, and the lyrics give us words to offer praise to God.
 - But hymns do something more than that.
 - Hymns also express the truths that we find when we read the Bible, and they do it in a simpler form.
 - This morning, I want to share some of the words from a hymn that is in our Glory to God hymnal.
 - It’s hymn #726, entitled “The Summons” and had I found it earlier in the week, we’d be singing it this morning, in worship.
 - But sometimes, my human timing isn’t in sync with God’s divine and I missed it earlier when I was researching hymns.
 - I’ve given Song-Yi a heads up that I’d ask her to play one verse of it for us, so we can hear it- it’s a Scottish folk tune.
 - The hymn itself has five verses- the first four of which are in the form of questions, with the final verse forming a response to the questions.
 - The first verse offers what I think is a profound summary of Jesus’s words, in today’s scripture reading from Mark.
 - It goes like this:
 - Will you come and follow me, If I but call your name?
 - Will you go where you don't know, And never be the same?
 - Will you let my love be shown?
 - Will you let my name be known?

- Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?
- As we examine Christ's words in today's scripture, let's take a closer look at this first verse line, by line.
- **1) Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?**
 - Scripture tells us that God knows our name;
 - That God has counted every hair on our head;
 - That God created us out of love and wants our communion.
 - God wants us to remember that we are part of a family- God's family.
 - We need the kind of childlike trust that comes, when we are called- that answers when asked.
 - We need to just let go.
 - In 2 Kings, chapter 5, there is a story about Naaman, an army commander.
 - Naaman is a valiant soldier, who wants to be cured of his leprosy.
 - In ancient times, Leprosy was a life shattering, incurable disease and we can imagine Naaman saying, at least to himself, "I'll do anything to be healed."
 - He travels a great distance from Damascus to Israel for that very purpose.
 - He takes with him many valuables- silver, gold and fine garments- offerings of riches to the one whom he seeks to cure him.
 - Yet, in the story, we learn that when Naaman hears the healing instructions from Elisha's messenger- simple instructions- to go wash in the Jordan river seven times, he becomes angry.
 - He leaves, saying I thought that for me, Elisha himself would at least come out and call on the name of the Lord.
 - And he would wave his hand and cure the leprosy!
 - Are not the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"
 - In other words, Naaman is saying, "when I said I would do anything to be cured of my leprosy, I meant anything within reason."
- When we are called, we need to be willing to give up our own expectations and follow Jesus unconditionally.

- Because we don't know all that God has in mind- for us, for others, for all of creation.
- **2) Will you go where you don't know...**
 - In all likelihood, God will lead us into unfamiliar territory.
 - God may ask us to do things we have never done before.
 - Sometimes we may want to hold back in our efforts at discipleship because we are reluctant to try something new.
 - Or maybe we want to give up because we grow frustrated when we can't see the results we expect.
 - Or sometimes we just feel overwhelmed by the huge needs around us and we can't see a way to even begin to make a difference.
 - In his book "Embrace the Spirit", Steve Harper writes that we run from servanthood because we think God is going to "throw us immediately into the deep end of the pool."
 - He then reminds us of the lessons which Scripture teach us- that God works with us in proportion to our faith.
 - Remember, Jesus first had his Disciples watch him before he gave them even the simplest of tasks.
 - If we resist God's call into the unfamiliar, we give up the opportunity grow into the person God created us and wants us to be.
- **3) And never be the same**
 - If we put ourselves in God's hands, our lives will be transformed.
 - We will never be the same.
 - Our commitment to serve God should be forward-looking.
 - There is no looking back.
 - Our commitment to serve God needs to be unwavering.
 - In 1 Kings 19, God tells Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah finds Elisha plowing his field with twelve yoke of oxen and throws his mantle over him.
 - In accepting Elijah's call to follow, Elisha slaughters his oxen, burns the equipment to cook them, and feeds the meat to the people.
 - Friends when a farmer kills his oxen and burns his equipment, there is no turning back! That is unwavering commitment!

- In spite of our best intentions, things can interfere with our commitment to serve God.
 - In today's scripture, the young man's wealth affected his willingness to do what God wanted him to do.
 - It caused him to turn his back on Jesus.
- Our commitment to God should be an absolute commitment to servanthood.
 - God doesn't hand us any unimportant work.
 - Sometimes God needs us behind the pulpit; sometimes God needs us in the classroom; sometimes God needs us working in the yard, sometimes God needs us in the kitchen!
 - We need to be open to each and every call.
- **4) Will you let my love be shown,**
 - God wants us to share the love of God, through the people we meet and the things we do. God counts on us to do that.
 - The Bible tells us that God has prepared works for us in advance.
 - If we don't mirror God's love in our lives through the things we do, the people we come into contact with may never experience that love.
 - When we focus on the needs of others and extend ourselves on their behalf, we become instruments of God's grace in their lives.
- **5) Will you let my name be known,**
 - We need to be disciples of the **WORD**.
 - We need to remember to spread the Good News.
 - If people don't hear it from us, they may never hear it at all.
- **6) Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?**
 - Our commitment to serve God needs to be Christ-centered.
 - Jesus needs to be at the center of our lives.
 - We become Christ-like in our lives as we live within the body of Christ.
 - And if we put limits on our willingness to grow, we may never reach our full potential.
 - Following Jesus and doing what God wants of us- wasn't easy in Jesus' day, and it certainly isn't easy today, given the world in which we live.

- The good news is that no matter how difficult the journey may be, we have help along the way.
 - Discipleship is not a solo voyage.
 - Being a Christian is a community undertaking.
 - Christ calls us into action not as individuals, but as God's people.
- And as the body of Christ, we help and support each other, and Jesus reminds us that he will be with us every step of the way.

Wrap it up

- Will you come and follow me If I but call your name?
 - Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
 - Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?
 - Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?
- These questions comprise the first verse of “The Summons”
 - And they are the questions God asks of us each day.
 - And the final verse of this hymn, expresses what our response should be.
 - It goes like this:
 - Lord, your summons echoes true, when you but call my name.
 - Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
 - In your company I'll go,
 - Where your love and footsteps show,
 - Thus I'll move and live and grow In you
 - And you in me.
- May it be so for all of us each and every day, forevermore. Amen