Called to Grow – Seeking God

Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24 Kimby Young

Mark 1:14-20 September 4, 2016

My entire ministry up until this church has been as an associate pastor specializing in discipleship. You can say that Christian Education is a passion for me. I have studied and imagined and explored and practiced ways of helping people to grow in their faith for at least 40 years – because my call to spiritual growth started long before my ordination – as I taught Sunday school and Vacation Bible School as a teenager. I love talking to people about faith. I love listening to people’s stories. I love encouraging people as they seek to know God. I love trying to help people to learn more about God or to come to know God more fully. And my faith grows as I help others to grow spiritually. So this time of year is very energizing for me - this back to school and back to Sunday School time of year. I believe many of us want to know God more deeply. I believe even people who don’t know they are looking for God feel a yearning for God. We want to feel God’s presence and respond to God’s Spirit. But I also believe we often do not know how to move forward. Like Todd’s song says – there are many voices calling out to us, distracting us, confusing us, pulling us away from that voice of truth – the one clear voice of God speaking love and power and life to us. It is hard to listen to that voice of truth – to listen and believe. So today, I have two encouragements for you to consider – two calls for you to hear. We as a congregation are called to grow – individually and corporately – and the two ways of growing are connected. You individually – each of you – each of us – You are personally called to grow in faith – to become more connected to God daily, to understand God’s word for you, and to respond faithfully. And until we accept that and work on that and step out of the boat to follow Jesus – then we cannot grow corporately as a congregation. Because what attracts new members is not a new pastor or a beautiful building or a strong heritage. What attracts new members is other Christians who are alive and excited about God’s presence showing that love of God actively and enthusiastically in the world. You know it. If you live your faith, other people see it and want to receive it. If you get excited about what is happening here, other people notice. If you love your church, other people want to know what you receive here at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner.

Now through the years I have noticed a lot of excuses to not grow spiritually, reasons not to get involved in discipleship programs. The chief reason is “I don’t have time.” And that is a legitimate reason. Time is limited and growth takes time. There are so many other obligations – all of which are important. Very often we put ourselves last and don’t invest the time we need in ways that would be beneficial. We don’t see the value in going to a Sunday school class or a Bible study or a fellowship group with so many other needs calling for our attention. So many voices calling out to us. I would suggest that if you invest the time in your own spiritual growth it WILL benefit every other part of your life. It’s an investment and I encourage you to make time to grow.

The second greatest reason for not investing time in discipleship is that we don’t realize we need to grow. It’s not that we think we know it all. It’s that we are comfortable as we are and maybe don’t even want to change. I’m a good Christian. I know God. I don’t need to work on my faith. I am already saved by Jesus. I’m comfortable with my faith. And all of that is true. But God might be calling you to go a little deeper, to reach a little farther, to follow in a new way. Growth is hard. Growing can hurt. Putting work into spiritual growth takes time and energy. And maybe we are even afraid it will be too difficult. And it could be true. But working on your own spiritual life can open doors you didn’t even know you needed. Connecting with God in new ways is worth the work. Once again, I would suggest, listen to that voice of truth and do not be afraid.

So if you are ready to step out of the safety of the boat and go where Jesus calls you, if you are ready to try to grow spiritually, to try to draw closer to God and to listen for God’s will for your life, there are hundreds of ways to start. In the next few months, give at least one new idea a try. Here are a few suggestions.

Join a class or group – lots of them are starting in the next month. Check the back of the bulletin. Check the last newsletter. Come to the mens fellowship, the ladies weekly Bible Study, the womens monthly fellowship, Sunday school, youth group. In October, I intend to start a new Bible Study for Bible basics for those of you who are new to study or don’t know where to begin. Look for more information about that in the next month. If none of that appeals to you make up your own group or study. Please, suggest something for the discipleship pillar to consider, or better yet, join the pillar and help us develop some alternatives.

Another fantastic way to nurture your own faith and to grow spiritually is to teach or lead a group. I learn more by teaching and interacting and learning while others learn. If you feel the call, all of our children’s and youth classes could use extra help some times. Just let us know if you would be interested.

Finally if you can’t manage to join one of our groups because they don’t meet your needs or your schedule, I encourage you to individual exploration on your own. There are literally millions of tools to help you grow spiritually and I would love to help you find a method that works for you. Get a daily devotion on your computer or phone. Read your Bible just a few minutes every day – or even just once a week. Find another book that intrigues you and helps you to explore faith questions. I have several hundred books you can borrow or a few thousand topics I could suggest. There are websites and videos and studies on almost every topic. Some of them are misleading – so talk to me or someone you trust about a good path you might pursue. Maybe it’s not study that will help you grow – maybe it is art or music or writing or movement or nature or action that will stimulate your faith and help you to grow in Christ. Maybe you have an interest or a talent you can turn over to God. God can use anything to reach you and connect with you. And if you don’t have any idea where to begin, please come talk to me. This is the kind of thing I love to explore. There are no questions too hard to follow. Even if you are struggling with your faith – that very well might be the voice of God speaking to you, calling you, inviting you to dig a little deeper. Listen to that voice of truth and step out into the unknown where God can open new possibilities for you.

In the scripture from Mark for today, we hear the familiar invitation Jesus extends to would be disciples. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men – I will show you how to invite others into the presence of God. Jesus calls on the disciples to use the skills, interests and gifts that they already have in order to serve God and help other people. You have something wonderful to offer – God’s love in Jesus Christ. The link between your own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others is not always clear. If you follow Jesus into life affirming, positive, transformative daily living, others will see that and will be drawn to that power of God in you. You can then be the instrument God uses to reach others with grace. God can use you to make life better for other people, to help others to be more of what God has called and created us to be. Jesus says COME. Follow me. Come, lead others to God. Come and be satisfied. Come and sustain others. Come that you may have life and have it in abundance. Come, share the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.