Come, Follow Me

Matthew 4:18-21 Kimby Young

Matthew 9:9-13 February 12, 2017

You have probably heard about disciples all of your life; Or at least, all of your Christian life. We think we have a pretty good idea of what it means to be a disciple - Like I talked about in the children’s time. In Biblical terms – a disciple was someone who would follow a teacher or leader in order to learn, and usually to learn by experience – like an apprentice, a field ed. student or an intern today. In the case of Jesus, the early disciples traveled with Jesus as he taught, helped provide whatever support they could, and tried to do what Jesus would do - to serve, to love, to bring comfort, to get to know God, to point other people toward God, and to better understand God’s will for their lives. In short, to learn and to follow Jesus.

The disciples during Jesus’ time, were ordinary men and women who were touched by God through Jesus Christ and whose lives were changed forever by that encounter. And yes, there were women among the disciples - not among the 12 who went on to lead the church, but definitely among the inner circle. Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, and a few other women seemed to play as important a role as Peter and James and John. In fact the gospel of John never limits the number of disciples to 12. That gospel talks about “crowds” of disciples. At one point in the gospel of Luke Jesus sends out 70 disciples in pairs to share the Good News – to practice what Jesus had taught. Paul makes it clear in the letters that discipleship continues to the next generation and the next. We believe discipleship continues for countless generations, even to today. We are disciples, called today to follow Jesus, to learn, to grow, and to practice what Jesus taught. Even our mission statement says we are called to discipleship – to learning and growing in the faith as we follow Jesus Christ in our daily lives.

I think the call to discipleship changes. That call is answered again and again thru our lifetimes in many different ways. The call is always “to follow Jesus.” But what it means for you to follow Jesus now, might be different than it was a few years ago, as it might be different for you than it is for me. What it means to follow Jesus evolves as our lives and our opportunities change. The challenge is to hear the call anew each day, and to decide what it means to follow Jesus in each time and place. How will you follow Jesus today? How will you follow tomorrow?

I will make a confession to you. When I go out to meetings of the Presbytery or colleagues and friends who have known me for a while, one of the first questions is always, “How’s it going in Gardner?” – meaning here at First Presbyterian Church. And I always answer with some variation of “really great” or I give a little more detail about why I think we are in a good position and doing wonderful mission, or what hopes we have for our future ministry. And – here’s the confession – I always detect a little note of surprise in my voice. Not at all because of you – you are a magnificent church with a rich and deep heritage and so many committed and caring volunteers. No – the surprise is that I am enjoying the role of solo pastor, and I seem to be doing pretty well. You see, I never saw myself as a leader – a disciple, yes; a helper, absolutely; a teacher, without a doubt. But a leader – a solo pastor? I didn’t see this coming. I didn’t see myself here, but I am positive I am in the right place now. I’m reminded of almost every Old Testament leader who protested when called. Moses at the burning bush said – I’m not a good speaker, find someone else. Jeremiah said – no, I’m too young. Amos, Isaiah, David – person after person heard God’s call and responded with self doubt. And time and time again, God said yes. Yes, I am calling you. And I will give you whatever gifts you need. You are up for the task. You are my partner in ministry. You are my chosen one. Even in the New Testament – in the readings from today. The disciples were just fishermen, just farmers, just ordinary people – even sinners like Matthew, even outcasts, aware of their faults and failures. The disciples didn’t believe they had anything to offer. But Jesus called them. Come, follow me. Jesus called them - to come, to rise, to be better than themselves, to be all that God created them to be. And Jesus calls us as well. Come, follow me.

Here at First Presbyterian Church, I occasionally hear the same tone of surprise when we talk about ministries and future possibilities. Can we grow as a church? Can we attract new members – young adults and young families? Can we reach out in mission serving needs in our community? Aren’t our best years behind us? Will we sustain financial stability? Can we increase our budget so that we can do more good work? Can we lead other people to Christ, and introduce new people to the love of God? Yes. Yes we can by God’s grace and thru God’s gifts. God is calling us to do so. God is beckoning us, begging us, beseeching us – follow me. And I will make you “fishers of men.” I will make you all that you need to be. I will make you able to flourish in ministry in Gardner. I will make you able to offer great ministries. I will make you able to care for many through your mission – to change lives and heal hearts. Come, follow me! Come, children of God! Come! Believe it! Follow me! Follow Jesus!

Something is happening here in this church, in this community of believers. I am sensing the moving of God’s Spirit. I am hearing the calling of Christ. I am seeing a vision of new life, vitality and growth in this church, of great things God has in store. And I’m not alone – some of you are feeling it too. God is moving among us, calling us to greater ministry, calling us to deeper love, calling us to passionate caring. Listen. Hear it. Hear Christ’s call to you to do your part. Hear Christ’s call to join this band of misfit disciples. Hear Christ’s call to offer your gifts.

In the scripture, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew, all the disciples – were just going about their ordinary days, their routine jobs, their simple lives. And God used them to change the world forever. Now Jesus is walking in to your ordinary day, your ordinary life, your ordinary family, and saying, “Come. Come, follow me.” Jesus is right here, right now, sitting right beside you. Listen. Jesus leans in toward you and calls, “Follow me.” “Follow me.” Listen. Listen carefully and prayerfully, and respond. I will follow. We will follow. Help us to follow. Yes, Lord. Wherever you lead us. Jesus says, “Follow me.” Follow me.