

“THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP!”

Epiphany 3 B; Lectionary 3

January 25, 2015

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

MORNING CARTOON:

Gladys Dunn was new in town and decided to visit the church nearest to her home. She appreciated the pretty sanctuary and the music by the choir, but the sermon went on and on. What's worse, it wasn't very interesting. Glancing around, she saw many in the congregation nodding off. Finally it was over.

After the service, she turned to a still sleepy-looking gentleman next to her, extended her hand and said, "I'm Gladys Dunn."

He replied, "You and me both!"

MESSAGE TEACHING POINTS:

1. One theme in Mark's Gospel is "discipleship".
2. Mark gets straight to that theme when he calls the first four disciples, fishermen.
3. Discipleship is about urgency
4. Discipleship is about relationship.
4. Discipleship is about God's kingdom reign.

Citation: Some from VEA, 1982 and others from Rob Bell, NOOMA®, "Dust".

THE MESSAGE:

"Pastor Bill" remembers teaching a Bible Study in one of his congregations not so long after he had began his ministry there. He had to come up with a provocative question to span the gap between the "there and then" to the "here and now". The study was on the calling of the disciples. It was on how those first disciples dropped everything to follow Christ. Pr. Bill's purpose was to get people to start thinking about their call to Christ. So, the question he asked was: "If Jesus were to come up to you and say: "Follow me!" what would be your response?"

Without hesitation, one person looked at him and said: "I know what yours would be"

"You do?" he innocently asked.

She laughed and said, "You'd say -- 'I'll have to ask my wife.'"

Today we've read the story of Jesus calling the first four disciples.

There is a lot of confusion about being disciples and about discipleship.

Many people think that “religion” is discipleship. That isn’t so. Religion is about going through the motions that we think will help set us right with God. Religion isn’t about discipleship.

Other people have the idea that being a Christian, promoting social harmony, unity and keeping everyone happy is discipleship. Not so. Being a Christian can lead to being a disciple. But just because one is a Christian doesn’t make one a disciple.

You see, discipleship is what grows out of a relationship with Jesus. Christianity is about being in a relationship with Jesus the Christ. It is about moving into a deep connection with Jesus, a deep belonging to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Out of that deep connectedness, grows repentance—the turning around of life. And that leads to commitment and commitment leads to discipleship.

With that in mind, Pr. Bill isn’t going to get too far down the road of “following” if he has to start with his spouse.

Look at how Jesus begins the invitation to follow.

It starts with John being in prison. That is to say the one who prepared the way has done the preparation work. John is now out of the picture. Jesus is beginning the work of salvation.

Then comes “time”. In the Bible, “time” isn’t about 10:00, 8:45 or 11. It is about “timing”. It is about the right and special moment having arrived when Jesus can begin to call forth a new vision, a change, a time of redirection. It is that right and special moment that has never been before arrives so that God can work. It is about a ‘decisive’ time.

Then comes the “kingdom”. At this right and special moment, the Kingdom, that is the rule of God. Is close. It is, in fact, at hand. It is about a kingdom that is now, in the present, in reality. It is about a kingdom that is a destiny for disciple fulfillment.

Then comes repentance. Repentance is about being made new. It is about “a u-turn”, a radical change. It is about being called out of one thing into another thing. It is about being called into a new and dramatically different relationship.

“Well,” you might say, “that’s all interesting. It sounds like a lot of theology talking. What does it have to do with us?”

Let's start with this: Have you ever wondered what was up with these fishermen? Why was it that they just dropped everything to follow this 30-year old itinerant?

This background might help.

In Jesus day, every boy, and probably girl, at 4 or 5, was in Beth Sefer (elementary school). Part of that education was to memorize the "Torah" -- the first five books of our Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – in Hebrew! This went on till about the age of 12 when youth made their first pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

From those students the best were selected to go on to further education Beth Midrash (secondary school) while those who did not go on went back home to learn the trade of their family.

A very few of the most outstanding Beth Midrash students sought permission to study with a famous rabbi. They were called talmidim, in Hebrew, disciples. This is more than being a student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows. A disciple would want to know what the teacher knows, as well as to be like the teacher and to learn to do what the teacher was doing. To become like the rabbi, the talmid would be totally devoted to being near the rabbi to be able to spend his entire time listening and observing the teacher to know how to understand the Scripture and how to put it into practice. The result was that by age 30 (age of Jesus when he began his ministry) one had earned, from the rabbi and from experience, the "authority" to teach others.

So, here's what radical here.

First, Jesus, who has reached the age of having "authority", is doing things backward and choosing his own disciples. He is being the actor in a culture where the disciples usually picked their own rabbi, their own teacher.

Second, if these men are fishermen, then they weren't following other rabbis. If they aren't following another rabbi, then they aren't the best of the best. They didn't make even the first cut. They had gone back home to learn the family trade.

So the message Jesus is sending is this: "I believe in you." I believe that you can know what I know, and learn to be what I am, and can learn to do what I do. Do you see what kind of faith Jesus had in them?

Sure enough, Jesus calls a movement of "anybodies" and "nobodies" and "not good enoughs". He calls them to change the course of human history and they did.

Of course, they obey. Of course, they surrender. Jesus has faith in them. Jesus believes in them. Jesus know that their life will be richer as they follow and enjoy the abundance that is in God's wake, the newness that is in their lives, the Kingdom that will be built and the world that will be changed.

Often our journey begins with faith. Faith in Jesus is important.

But what about Jesus' faith in us. He must have faith in us because he calls us to discipleship, to following Him. Jesus believes in us that we will be able to make the difference—to not only know what Jesus knows or to be like Jesus, but to do what Jesus does.

That's the nature of discipleship. The time has come, the Kingdom is at hand, repent and believe that Jesus believes in you.

Amen.

May you believe in God, but may you come to see that God believes in you. May you have faith in Jesus. But may you come to see that Jesus has faith that you can be like him. A person of love and compassion and truth. A person of forgiveness, and peace and grace, and joy and hope. And may you be covered with the dust (from following so closely) of your rabbi, Jesus" Rob Bell