



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Third Sunday After the Epiphany

January 26, 2014

“Once Lost– Now Found... and Called”

(Matthew 4:18-22)

Rev. David K. Groth

“While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:18-22).

Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

“Follow me,” he said, and immediately they followed. Following involves motion, your feet taking you someplace in Jesus’ name. You can’t expect to follow him just by sitting in here.

Normally we think of faith mostly as a list of beliefs we ascribe to and are ready to sign off on. But in the Bible, faith is often about getting up and following. It’s there from the very beginning. For example, it’s there when an elderly couple, Abraham and Sarah, comfortable, wealthy, settled, hear God’s Word. “Go from your country,” God tells them. “Leave your family, your native land, your comfort and security.” “And Abraham went.” Centuries later, Paul is still impressed with that. He writes, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went . . . as in a foreign land, living in tents” (Heb. 11:8ff). That, the Bible says, is part of what faith is. There’s a rhythm to it. “Get up and go . . .” God says to his prophets, one by one, and the very next line is usually, “So he got up and went.” In the Bible faith is at least as much about following as it is about subscribing to a list of doctrines.

Lutherans tend to error on the side of defining faith intellectually. And so we can have a grand old time arguing with one another about who’s in and who’s out, whose beliefs are real and orthodox and whose are watered down and heretical. Or maybe you tell yourself that you don’t belong, cannot truly belong, because you cannot sign off on every single tenant of

the faith. Or you tell yourself that one over there doesn't really belong because you happen to know he struggles with evolution verses creation. So maybe he's a member in name only, or by the skin of his teeth because we're such a tolerant and friendly bunch. But in truth, he's kind of a second rate Lutheran, of "mixed breed" as opposed to those with sterling pedigrees.

I don't mean to denigrate theology. We must know what we believe and why. And teaching those biblical truths is the strength of our denomination. Lutherans have specialized in education, from the pre-schoolers all the way up. Ours is a faith that seeks understanding. We love God not just with our hearts, but also with our minds. But we do need to remember that in the Bible (and in this text) faith is at least as much about following as it is confessing.

Peter and Andrew, James and John, they make it look so easy. They seem so quick to drop what they are doing in order to follow. There's something almost zombie-like about their response. It makes me wonder how much they already knew about Jesus. It also makes me wonder about their personal lives. Were they restless . . . bored . . . frustrated with the status quo? Were James and John sick and tired of waking up while it was still dark in order to climb into a cold, wet boat so they could throw out cold, wet nets in order to haul up a few cold, wet fish? Or maybe James and John felt oppressed by their father Zebedee, his rigid, unbending ways. It's Zebedee's way or no way when it comes to mending a net or cleaning a fish.

Of course, we don't know any of that. All we know is that they heard Jesus calling them to follow and they did. They got up and followed. *We know* they didn't have it all figured out. They simply started following him.

Notice, the initiative is all his, not theirs. Jesus comes to them. He comes to them where they are. Peter and Andrew, James and John . . . they don't seem to be "seekers." When Jesus finds them, not a one of

them was at prayer or digging through the Old Testament scrolls. They were not searching for God; they were mending their nets.

Sometimes we get it into our heads that we are the ones always in search of God. We are the ones who make a decision for Christ. And a lot of Christians like to talk about when they found God. But in the Bible, consistently, the initiative is God's, not ours. God comes to us. God searches for us. God tracks us down. Right from the beginning, Adam and Eve try to hide "themselves from the Lord among the trees of the garden." But God will have none of it. He flushes them out.

He is the God of pursuit. Remember how he ran Jonah down? To avoid following Jonah was trying to flee all the way to Tarshish, the far side of his Mediterranean world. But God pursued Jonah all the way to the deepest, darkest depths of the sea.

God is not passive and waiting for us to find him. In Luke, the Good Shepherd finds the lost sheep, not the other way around. In that same chapter, Jesus tells the story of an old woman who loses one of her ten coins. She lights up a lamp and turns the place upside down and does not stop looking until she finds her coin. That inanimate coin is you and me. We were dead in our sin (Eph. 2:1). Spiritually inanimate, we were no more able to find God than a coin is able to find its owner. But God graciously found us.

In Revelation, Jesus says "I stand at the door and knock." He will not break down the door and charge in like they do in "Law and Order." But he will come back. He'll be knocking again. Writer Anne Lamott speaks of her conversion as finally giving in to his relentless pursuit. For years she was resisting. For years she was trying to ignore is knocking at the door. Finally, "I took a long breath" she wrote, "and said out loud, 'All right, you can come in now.'"

"Where can I go from your Spirit?" the psalmist asks. "Where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps.

139:7). People like to talk about their search for God, almost as if God were a set of misplaced car keys. But the awkward truth is that it is we who have misplaced ourselves. Because of sin, we are by nature lost. Because of sin we are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. Therefore faith is not so much about our struggle to find God. It's much more about our struggle to follow God, the God who has found us.

Following Jesus doesn't happen mostly within these walls. Mostly, it happens out there. Word and Sacrament ministry happens here, and that's what equips us and moves us to follow him out there. And no one gets a pass. God comes to *each* of us and calls us to follow. Among the first disciples, there's not a priest, rabbi or professor in the bunch. They're all what we would call "laity." And yet the command, the invitation is, "Follow me."

Similarly, God is calling you to follow him. Some of you need to respond by leaving home and going to the seminary or maybe law school or nursing school. Most of you, however, need to stay home and keep doing what you already are doing, going to work, taking care of the business, diapering the baby, cooking the meal, teaching the class, closing the deal. We are called to follow him in our vocations, whatever they are. Usually God doesn't want us to give up what we're good at and enjoy doing in order to that which were not good at nor trained for. Normally he calls us to follow him in the vocations he's already given us, to the best of our ability, and in his name and for his sake. And he also calls us to follow him in those matters about which we are most passionate, our strongest concerns and our deepest commitments. What are your passions? Cleaner air? Better schools? Protecting the lives of the unborn? There's at least a chance the Lord is leading you to your passion and wants you to follow.

Jesus also calls us to follow him in the relationships we have, and the encounters and challenges of our daily lives. That's where faith is lived out, where you live and move and have your being.

Here is where you are equipped. Here is where your faith is bolstered and repaired and strengthened by God's Word. Here is where your sin is washed away by his blood. But the following happens mostly out there.

And notice, God does not force the issue. He doesn't drag anyone behind him by the ankles. He does not treat us as objects. He treats us with respect, as persons made in his own image. We are free to ignore and resist his call to follow. We are free to spend our lives trying to avoid following him. But God will not give up. He will not stop calling, urging, pleading until either we die or finally say, "Ok, have it your way."

Finally it is grace that enables us to follow him. It is grace that he flushes us out and finds us in the first place, when we, as the great grandchildren of Adam and Eve would sooner hide from and avoid him. And it is grace that enkindles the fire of faith in us by his Word. It is grace that calls us to follow. It is grace that transforms us to be more like him.

In our text, James and John, sons of Zebedee . . . "sons of Thunder" Jesus calls them in Mark, apparently alluding to their zeal and temperament, their hot-headedness of which we see glimpses in the Gospels. Jesus calls those hot heads to follow him and transforms them with his grace from fishermen to fishers of men.

And so it is with many. Saul, a persecutor of Christians, is hunted down by God, not in order to seek vengeance, but to transform him by grace. He becomes Paul.

The woman who anointed his feet with tears and oil . . . she was a great sinner. But somewhere along the way Jesus found her and forgave her of much, and so her gratitude was also great.

Or Zacchaeus . . . chief tax collector, filthy rich, in cahoots with the Roman occupiers, a collaborator, and a little man who climbed a big tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. To Zacchaeus' utter astonishment, Jesus found him, coming right up to his tree, and said,

“Zacchaeus, you come down now. I’m coming to your house today.” Jesus transformed him by grace.

“I once was lost, but now am found” says the hymn. Once lost – now found. That’s how it works. That’s how it worked with his first disciples. That’s how it worked with you. Whether you knew it or not, you were lost in sin. But somewhere along the way he found you, cleansed you, and daily calls you to follow him anew.

You don’t have to have it all worked out up here [the head] to do that. You don’t have to have all the answers down pat. There are no experts in the company of Jesus. We are all learners, disciples, followers, going where he leads.

Each of us, once lost, now found, also called. Thanks be to God. Amen.

