

2020 10 18 – Come Follow Me

Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee and he saw a couple of fishermen casting their net into the sea. He said them, “Come follow me.” And they did! And then two others left their boat and their father and followed him too! These four men left everything they knew and loved and they followed Jesus. Why on earth did they do that? What was it about Jesus that attracted them, persuaded them, compelled them, to follow him?

Recent scholars now believe that Jesus had been in that area for quite a while and that Peter, Andrew, James and John had already met him. The fishermen had probably heard him preaching and maybe even witnessed or experienced firsthand, his healing powers. They knew that he was the kind of man who treated everyone the same; that he broke bread with priests, and prostitutes, fishermen and tax collectors. They knew that Jesus proclaimed a different kind of world view; that he spoke of a time when violence and oppression would be replaced with peace and justice.

Maybe those fishermen followed him because of the healing spirit that flowed so strongly through him. Maybe they followed him because through his words and actions they caught a glimpse of the reign of God that Jesus was proclaiming. Maybe they followed him because of his magnetism, because of the aura of love that surrounded him. Or maybe they followed him because they believed his mission would give purpose to their lives.

Reading this passage again, made me think about my own call to ministry. The call that led me to leave everything I knew and loved and move here to a new province and a new vocation. There were many steps in my call. It certainly wasn't an immediate action like the one described in the gospel of Matthew. But there were definitely some similarities:

- I heard some inspirational preachers in the United Church who proclaimed Jesus' message of peace and justice;
- I experienced the healing power of the Holy Spirit in my own life; and
- Through small church groups I connected with people from all walks of life and grew to understand the power of mutual relationships of love and compassion.

Gradually, I realized that I was being called to be a part of Jesus' mission of healing and teaching and his vision of peace and justice. My call was to ordained ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Ministry comes in many forms. For me it was a vocational call and it changed pretty much everything about my life. But usually that's not the case. Steve Harvey, an American comedian, businessman and entertainer, once said, "Your career is what you're paid for. Your calling is what you're made for." Your calling is your purpose, your mission, your reason for being. It often changes throughout our lives. For many of us, a good portion of our lives are spent raising a family, but then children grow up and new purpose needs to be found. And so we search out new places in our lives where we can find meaning, where we can connect with our reason for being.

Many of us have found that purpose, that call, in the mission of the church. Here at First United we are involved in an incredible number of ministries: food and hospitality, pastoral care, charitable giving, spiritual nurture through music and worship and small groups, youth ministries, Sunday School, providing space for community groups, refugee sponsorship, celebrating diversity, caring for creation and the lists goes on and on.

Every Sunday we are also inspired by the stories of ministries beyond our own. In the Minute for Mission we hear about all the ways that people in our national church are being called to ministry. We hear about all the ways that Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing and reconciliation is being lived out in Canada and around the world. All of these ministries are being supported through the dollars that we send to Mission and Service.

Today we watched a wonderful video that showed brief clips of many of those ministries. But my favourite thing about the video was the music. The youth band that you heard is called *Strange Situations* and they were able to record their original song thanks to our Mission & Service dollars. Did you hear these words near the beginning of their song?

Now we need some guidance.
Something to remind us
of what we've been called to this earth for.
So just give us Jesus
and we swear that we will go out
and change the world with help.
Now watch a generation begin!

How inspiring is that! Just give us Jesus. Just give us his message of peace and justice, his message of love and compassion. And then watch us follow him.

When you give to Mission and Service, you are not only following your own call, but you are supporting the call to ministry of hundreds, maybe even thousands, of people around this world:

- You are supporting the call of Bonnie Morton and Peter Gilmer the staff of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry;
- You are supporting the call of Lorraine Harkness at Integrated Community Ministries in Saskatoon;
- You are supporting the call of Dave Fletcher, the chair of the Camp Shagabec Committee, his wife Kat and the entire O'Donnell family who work tirelessly to provide a key youth ministry here in SW Saskatchewan;
- You are supporting the call of people around this country who do the work of reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples, who support new expressions of church, and who lead our women's organizations;
- You are supporting all the partnerships that the United Church has around the world with local organizations who make a difference in developing countries;
- You are supporting the call of Norma Hain, Adele Heise and all the other Licensed Lay Ministers in this province and across Canada; and
- You are supporting the call to ministry of all the ordained, commissioned and Designated Lay Ministers in the United Church of Canada, including mine.

We all have our own purpose, our own reason for being in this world. We all have the opportunity to follow Jesus' call and to help build God's reign of peace and justice. Through Mission and Service we are also given the opportunity to

support the calls of people across The United Church of Canada. May we all be ready to answer when Jesus calls our name, when he says, "Come Follow Me."