

Message: “Come! Follow Me”

[video: “Prepare Ye” by Godspell]

I love the beginning and ending of the video clip from Godspell.

It shows people hearing a call and walking away from whatever they were doing to respond, first to John the Baptist and then to Jesus. They do so with anticipation, joy and a lack of concern for the material things of the world. After their time with John, they head back into the world, looking forward to what will come, taking good energy with them.

That’s an uplifting illustration of our scripture readings over the past few weeks.

We began by remembering the baptism of Jesus and our own baptism. We embraced our baptismal vow to dedicate our prayers, presence, giving, service and witness to the Lord. Jesus’ identity and our identity is intertwined in a glorious narrative, the story of our encounter and experience of God in life.

Last week, we read and studied the apostle John’s narrative about how Jesus called the disciples. We had fun learning not only the names of the disciples, but more about their relationship to Jesus and each other. We realized we, too, are connected by relationships to each other and God. Jesus reveals his divine nature to us, showing us the spiritual side of life. It’s a side we seldom encounter, yet our soul cries out to be filled. Only God’s love can fill the void.

Today, we’re reading a more well-known account of the narrative, written by Matthew. Matthew gives a different account of the way Jesus invited his first followers to become disciples. There are some differences that make our reading difficult. For one thing, John’s account places Jesus and the disciples in Judea, near Jerusalem. Matthew’s version puts Jesus and the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is more than 70 miles north.

Now it's not important for us to harmonize these two accounts. Each gospel stands on its own. They’re written by two different people with two different viewpoints. John was an eyewitness to the events, since he was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. John was the brother of

James, one of the sons of Zebedee, the fisherman. They were among the first called by Jesus to follow and begin to live a new way.

Matthew became a disciple later. His narrative is based on what others told him. We don't know if they forgot, or if Jesus' relationship began in one place and was completed in another or what may have happened. That's not important. It's a matter of opinion. Answering Jesus' call is important as it lies at the heart of our faith.

Each of the narratives has equal validity. Each tells the story of how the disciples answered Jesus' call, "*Come! Follow me and I will make you fishers of people*" (v19). Their response changed their lives and the lives of others for the better.

All our stories of answering Jesus' call are equally important. If you're sitting here today, it's because you heard Jesus' call. Some of you heard it and immediately knew who was calling and what you were to do. Service is part of who you are. Some of us heard the call but needed to be convinced it was meant for us. We're experts at the "what if?" game. Maybe we wrestled with the difficulties that science, organized religion or suffering pose. Our head ruled over our heart, rather than being in balance with it. We're still learning how to serve and how to rely on God's strength more than our own.

Some of you aren't sure what you're hearing. You're attracted to spiritual things, but perhaps you've been hurt by people at the church or you don't understand how God would let unjust things happen. You need God's grace, but don't understand how to receive it or what grace means to you. Please forgive me, I know this is a dramatic oversimplification. Thank you for joining us today. It took courage. It's a sign that you hear God's call, even if it's a small, quiet voice.

What does it mean to answer Jesus' call?

The call to follow Jesus is a call to be in relationship and serve others. I believe our greatest service as disciples doesn't come from big and dramatic things, but from the small acts of kindness and compassion and the one-to-one acts of justice we practice every day. That's how God blesses us. And it's how we pass God's blessings on, by simple acts of love, kindness and justice.

Esperanza shared a story with me on the drive home yesterday.

Pastor Rick Warren, who, with his wife Kay, founded Saddleback Church forty years ago this month, tells a story about how we can answer Jesus’ call. On a radio program, Rick shared a story about Erich Stamminger, who was the president and CEO of Adidas. Erich read Rick’s book, [The Purpose Driven Life](#), and became a follower of Jesus.

One day, Erich talked to Rick and asked him, “Should I quit my job and become a pastor?” Rick’s response was simple and direct: “No.”

“Warren insisted Stamminger keep his position and utilize the influence he already had to reach others for Christ. Rick told Erich to pray for the non-Christian members of the company's executive board with the board's Christian members. Pastor Warren also told Erich to take care of his 25,000 employees, and make friends with the celebrities his company endorsed. Stamminger still serves on the company's board.

In addition to working to build the kingdom of God, we work so we can give to charity. We can build a powerful testimony through the quality our work. God can use work to develop our character, and we can express our gifts to provide for ourselves and our families.”¹

Rick Warren describes his book as an “anti-self-help book.”

The first sentence says, “It's not about you,” and the rest goes on to explain how the quest for personal fulfillment, satisfaction, and meaning can only be found in understanding and doing what God placed you on Earth to do.

Jesus’ call to “*follow me*” is for each one of us. No one else can answer for you. Jesus calls us to answer the call in the specific context where we’ve been placed. We don’t have to go to a war zone to follow Jesus. We don’t have to go to another country, or another city, or even another neighborhood.

To quote an old expression, all I need do is “hoe my own row.” I’m to tend the garden where God planted me. You’re to tend the garden where God planted you. We’re to nurture the people God has placed in our community. We don’t have to try to do it all. We can concentrate on

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rick-warren-work-is-not-gods-punishment-for-man-83338/#LKlOqG9LOAjUqbB6.99>

our part. God will do the greater part. Think about it: if each one of us does our part, imagine how we can change the world by sharing God’s love and grace!

I believe there’s a pivotal moment in Matthew’s scriptures. The moment isn’t verse 19, when Jesus called Peter and Andrew saying, “*Come! Follow me...*”. The shift happens in verse 17 when Jesus says, “*Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!*” Herod arrested John the Baptist for speaking out against him. When Jesus hears John was arrested, he moves from Nazareth, where he was living, to Capernaum. Capernaum is where Peter and his family lived.

Capernaum is at the heart of Galilee. It’s the very heart of darkness for many in the community. It would be like one of us moving to the heart of the toughest, most disreputable neighborhood we could find. Jesus is living on skid row, the most depressed and marginalized place we can imagine. The people living there see themselves as second-class citizens. That’s where Jesus starts his ministry. He doesn’t go to the temple in Jerusalem. He doesn’t go to Herod in the palace. He doesn’t go to the Roman governor.

Jesus goes to a place where life is gloomy and dark, with little chance of improvement. The people there are demoralized and disorganized. There’s little likelihood their situation will change on their own. It’s called Galilee of the Gentiles or the place of people from different nationalities. Today, it’s where modern-day Palestine is. It didn’t get better under the Romans or over the centuries. People are still fighting over it. Yet that’s where Jesus based his public ministry.²

Matthew 4:23 tells us what he did there, “*Jesus went around everywhere throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and attending to every disease and every sickness among the people.*”

The people didn’t need another teacher or preacher, or even a miracle worker. They needed someone to attend to their needs. They needed someone who would listen and respond to their pain, loss and

² <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/after-epiphany-worship-series-overview/follow-me-planning-notes/follow-me-preaching-notes#t3>

suffering. Yes, they needed teaching and to hear good news. But the healing they needed most of all was the kind that comes from listening and caring. And that's just what Jesus offered them.

Here are some facts: 160,000 people live in Corona. Only 5% (8,000) are in church each week. That means 9 out of every 10 people you see are battling with the turmoil, challenges and darkness of today without a spiritual tether or guide to give them hope.

How can you answer Jesus' call to care for others?

Let us pray...

Matthew 4:12-23 (CEB)

Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee. He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
alongside the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who lived in the dark have seen a great light,
and a light has come upon those who lived in the region and in
shadow of death.*

From that time Jesus began to announce, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!"

As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." Right away, they left their nets and followed him. Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues. He announced the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness among the people.