

Jesus said, “Follow me...”

Years ago John Naisbitt asked a question that has haunted me throughout my ministry. In his book entitled *Megatrends*, Naisbitt asked, *what happened to the railroad?* 150 to 100 years ago the railroad was one of the dominant industries in America. As our country moved westward, the railroad became a life line to far away places. Where the railroad passed through, towns emerged and cities grew. The railroad shaped America. Is that still true today? What happened to the railroad? Naisbitt said, “The railroad came to believe that its business was to run the railroad.” Make sure that everything was operating smoothly and have all the trains were running on time. “No!” said Naisbitt, transportation was its business. Moving people, moving products, connecting places – that was its business. When the railroad came to believe that its business was simply to run the railroad, well the railroad is still here today, but it is no longer shaping the world.

That rang bells for me. If we believe that the business of Providence United Methodist Church is to run the Church, then 100 years from now we will be here but we will not be shaping the world. According to the great commission, our business is to make disciples. Our business is to connect people with Jesus Christ. Our business is to follow Jesus and to be fishers of people. We all have ideas about how to run the church – but how do we make disciples? Jesus said, “Follow me...”

Our story this morning takes place on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. One day Jesus was walking along the shore when he saw two fishermen casting their nets. Jesus said to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.”

When they had walked a little farther they saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were mending their nets. Jesus said: “Follow me.” Immediately they left their father in the boat with the hired men and they followed him.

The thing that puzzles me about this story is that Jesus said: “Follow me...” and they did. They left their families, they left their boats, they left their jobs - they left everything behind to follow Jesus. How do you explain something like that? Well, there are there are at least three different interpretations of our passage of scripture, so I want to share with you three different ways of looking at this story in hope that we will learn something about making disciples here at Providence. Let’s call the first interpretation – ***Love at First Sight.***

Do you believe in love at first sight? My parents did. Many of you know my parents, but you probably don’t know how they met. My mother was from Roanoke, Virginia. She was engaged to a guy named Bob from Virginia Tech. Her family moved to Asheville, NC where my father was working. One day their mutual friends met at a diner

for lunch. Mom and Dad started talking to each other. Dad noticed that she was wearing an engagement ring. He said, "If you give him that ring back I will give you one twice as big." She said, "O.K." I said, "Mom! That is a terrible story. Not only did you break Bob's heart, but you also fell for a really weak pick up line." She smiled and said, "We just knew." They are now retired and living at the Methodist Home here in Charlotte. I think they are going to make it.

Maybe something like that was happening in our passage of scripture this morning. Maybe Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishing one day when Christ appeared on the shore and said, "Follow me..." and they knew. I can only imagine what it would have been like to meet the Son of God face to face - maybe they just knew. Actually, I think this happens more that we realize.

If a person who grew up in the church moves to Charlotte, they will most likely shop on line for a church (this is why we have a website) then they will come and visit for several weeks. Sometimes people will visit for a couple of years before transferring their membership. But if a person has never been a Christian they might give us one hour. If they come to church (for whatever reason - maybe someone invited them - maybe something has happened in their life and they are turning to the church) they will give us one hour. At the end of the service they will either say, "Well, that was a waste of time." Or, they will say, "This is what I have been missing in my life." They just know and they will choose in one hour whether to walk away or take their first steps in following Jesus and becoming a disciple. So, we are speed dating this morning. But the amazing thing - the God thing - is that it happens.

Years ago the church I was serving had a Senior High Retreat. One of the youth had to back out at the last minute. So, a youth invited a friend. Her parents did not go to church. She had no idea what she was getting into. During the retreat this youth gave her life to Christ and today, some years later, that young woman is still an active and growing disciple in that church. It happens. Sometimes people will know before the closing hymn. They just know.

What this tells me is that we need to be a church where people see, feel, and experience our love for the Lord. We need to practice, not just radical hospitality in that one hour (as important as that truly is), but also radical discipleship. People need to see us learning and growing and living our faith. They need to see us following Jesus and being willing to help others take their first steps. How do you make disciples? Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." That is the love at first sight interpretation.

Let's call the second interpretation the *Telescoping Interpretation*. Do you know how a telescope or spyglass can be expanded and contracted? Perhaps Mark has contracted (or telescoped) our story. Let me give you an example.

In the year 48 B.C. the Roman Senate eagerly awaited word concerning the war in Asia Minor. Communication was slow in those days and the fate of the empire hung in the balance. At the conclusion of the war, Julius Caesar sent a message consisting of three

words: “Vene Vede Veci” It means: “I came, I saw, I conquered.” Well, you know that there was more to it than that. Julius Caesar telescoped his message. He squeezed an entire war into three words. And perhaps Mark has done something similar. Mark tells us that Jesus came, he saw, and they followed. But maybe there is more to it than that.

The Gospel of Mark begins by telling us that John the Baptist came from the wilderness of Judea to prepare the way of the Lord. The Gospel of John tells us that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:40). John the Baptist introduced Andrew to Jesus. Andrew went and told his brother Peter. This second interpretation suggests that John the Baptist had prepared the first disciples for following Jesus, they already knew about Jesus and wanted to know more, so when Jesus said, “Follow me...” they were prepared and ready to go! This interpretation tells me that we need to be preparing people to follow Jesus.

When does making a disciple begin? I say it begins with baptism. When an infant is baptized we bring them to our nursery where we are showing them that we are a church family. As children we teach them the stories of Jesus, and as youth we challenge them to take their baptismal vows as their own and to give their lives to Christ. As adults we challenge one another to continue learning and growing and living for our Lord. Following Jesus is something that can happen at any age. Making disciples is a life-long process.

That is our business. This is why we are here. Our business is to make disciples and to connect people with Jesus Christ. Of course, you will not find all this spelled out in our passage of scripture this morning. Rather, Mark has telescoped all this into the shortest of words. Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.”

Here is your third interpretation. Let’s call this *The Paul Revere Interpretation*. This is different so bear with me. You remember the poem: “Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.” All Paul Revere said was “The British are coming” and people immediately followed. Perhaps something like that was going on behind our passage this morning.

At the time of our text there was growing tension between the Jews and the Romans. This tension would lead to the Jewish war (66-70AD). We know from biblical and historical sources that there were people in Galilee who were ready to start a rebellion.

Our passage of scripture begins by saying, “After John (the Baptist) was put in prison, Jesus went into the region of Galilee proclaiming... ‘The time has come... The kingdom of God is near.’” If people wanted a rebellion, and Jesus said, “The time has come,” Maybe the first disciples thought that this was the beginning of a revolution.

If this is why the disciples left their boats to follow Jesus then they were wrong. Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world.” Jesus taught us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Later Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. Have you ever

wondered why the first disciples were so slow to get it? Maybe it is because they had preconceived notions that they needed to unlearn. I think that is true today.

Sometimes people follow Jesus for the wrong reasons. *I want to join a church because that is where the movers and shakers are. I want to be a follower because I have my own agenda to pursue. I want to follow Jesus because it makes me look good.* Because of this, I think that there are many people today who are skeptical about Jesus. *Jesus is the guy that preachers talk about when they want to get money out of people. Jesus is the guy that politicians talk about when they want to get elected. Jesus is the guy my mother talked about when she wanted to make me feel guilty.* People have all sorts of ideas about Jesus. But Jesus said, “Follow me...” Walk with me, talk with me, learn and discover a new life with me. That is what the first disciples did. They watched how he reached out to the outcasts and loved the unlovable. They saw him heal the sick and speak the truth of God. They saw him make a difference in so many lives that their lives were changed – to the point that Peter would say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” And when they finally got it, they spent the rest of their lives being fishers of people.

So, we have three interpretations: *(1) Love at first sight disciples, (2) Telescoped disciples who were prepared to follow Jesus, and (3) Paul Revere disciples who learned and grew and discovered a new life.* Which interpretation is right? Is it possible to say all the above? All of this is what it means to be a disciple.

Friends, we need to be a church where people can fall in love with Jesus. We need to be a church that is preparing people to become disciples. We need to be a church where people can spend a lifetime of learning, growing, and living for our Lord. This is why we are here. This is our business. How do we do this? It begins when we take our first steps toward Jesus. It begins when we hear Jesus say, “Follow me...”