

“A FAITH ON THE GO!”

3) “The Disciples—Coming and Going”

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We’ve all heard the phrase that life can be so busy that we don’t know if we are coming or going. While this is an expression that we use to talk about the fast pace of our lives, it occurs to me that it is also be a phrase that can be used, with some accuracy, to describe the life of the twelve whom Jesus called to follow. In this, the third message in our three part series, “A Faith on the Go!,” we will be considering the nature of the call of those who have chosen to follow Jesus, both past and present. Previously, you may recall, we have considered God’s call to both Abraham and Moses, inviting them to trust God and step out in faith.

In our first scripture lesson, we notice that John’s account of the calling of the first disciples differs dramatically from the accounts found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. You will notice here that there is no description of the Sea of Galilee or any reference to the fishing trade of those whom Jesus called. There is, instead, a simple, three word invitation...“Come and See.”

I find it fascinating to think that this remarkable journey of faith—a journey that would not only transform the lives of those who followed, but, through them, the life of our world, began with this simple three word invitation.

In our reading it is John the Baptist who points to Jesus and identifies him as the “Lamb of God.” Two of the Baptizer’s followers then follow Jesus. Seeing this, Jesus asks them, “What are you looking for?” And they respond with a question of their own: **“Rabbi, where are you staying?”**

Apparently, they were interested in a conversation that could not be shared over a quick cup of coffee. Reading between the lines, I suspect that they were impressed enough by what they had heard about and what they had seen in Jesus that they wanted to have an extended conversation—one that would take a little time. **“Rabbi, where are you staying?”**

Then came the invitation of Jesus: **“Come and see.”** I am impressed by the fact that there is an easiness in this response that was not presumptuous, not pretentious, but quaintly casual... “Come and see,” as if to say, “Check it out for yourself. See what I’m about and then decided for yourself if this is what you are looking for.”

And, as the gospel narrative unfolds, that is precisely what they did. In a word, they “experienced” Jesus in a personal, day to day fashion. Their encounter with Jesus wasn’t just an intellectual or theoretical exercise. It was an experience not just of the head, but of the heart...and it was this experience of Jesus that proved to be far more convincing than any theological argument.

When you stop to think about it, this was, and has always been, the essence of Jesus' call—not only to those first followers, but to any and all who have chosen to follow since, including you and me. We have been called to experience Jesus for ourselves and not just with our heads, but with our hearts as well.

Ultimately, you see, this faith of ours is about more than intellect. It is primarily about relationship and the experience of learning to know and love—even as we have been known and loved by God.

Our calling, then, begins with the simple invitation to “Come and see.” But it does not stop there. The experience of Jesus is not intended to be an end in itself. Instead, it is intended to be a prelude to the expression of the witness of service to others. To experience the love of God personally leads to the expression of that love socially—in the form of service to others. Thus the call to “come and see” becomes the call to “go and serve!”

In our lesson from Luke's Gospel, Jesus send his disciples out to serve on their first training mission. It was a way, I think, of helping them to “get their feet wet” by translating faith in to action, love into service. Jesus was quite aware that a dynamic faith is one that while experienced inwardly, is invariably, expressed outwardly. As the Book of James has so pointedly stated, **“faith without works is dead.”**

In his address to Congress and to our nation this past week, Pope Francis captured the essence of this calling when he cited the “golden rule.”

“This Rule,” he said, “points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us.”

The call to follow Jesus is a call to use the “yardstick” of compassion, the “yardstick” of service, the “yardstick” of love. It is not enough to merely “come and see” this Jesus. It is only when we choose to “go and serve” that we discover what it really means to follow in his footsteps.

Over the past fifteen days, we, as a congregation, have chosen to tangibly express our love and service to others through a wide variety of service projects. Indeed, we have had people “coming and going” in a number of ways. We have a video clip that will give witness to some of those ways...

Our calling then is one that begins, first of all, with the invitation to “come and see” who Jesus is and what his word and witness is all about. Secondly, it then calls us to act upon what we have seen—to take what we have experienced in this relationship with Jesus and express it outwardly in love, compassion and service to others. We are called to “go and serve.”

But our calling does not end there. In our third scripture lesson of the morning, we read of what has been called, “The Great Commission” at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. Prior to his departure, Jesus provides his disciples with their “marching orders,” orders that will continue the work already begun.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28: 19-20)

Just as we are called to “come and see,” to “go and serve,” so we are also called to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

The mission statement of the United Methodist Church, as you may know, is to “Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” While I believe that this is an excellent statement, one that reminds us of why we are in business to begin with, I think that it is important to reflect upon what it really means. What does it mean to “make disciples?” How are disciples made?

Is the church supposed to adopt the model of the “assembly line” in which freshly formed disciples roll off the conveyor belt and are then packaged and shipped to local markets? Is that what it means to make disciples?

I don’t think so. I don’t think disciples are made through the adoption of a cookie cutter or assembly line technique. I don’t think disciples are made through organization flow charts or institutional mandates.

I think disciples are made wherever and whenever, we simply allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us, using our best efforts, including our flaws and our foibles, to somehow, give witness to what we have seen and heard, what we have felt and known, what we have discovered in our experience of faith.

Peter Weaver, a United Methodist Bishop in the New England Conference, offers a helpful metaphor for what it really means to make disciples. He suggests that it is a process that can be likened to the experience of making pickles.

He points out that the art of making a pickle is not one that can be abbreviated or rushed. It is only after the cucumber has been immersed for several days in a specially concocted “brine” that is transformed from cucumber to pickle. He points out that a cucumber does not become a pickle merely by squirting a little pickle juice on it. No, what is needed is the immersion process where the cucumber is “steeped” in the brine over time. Only then is the cucumber changed from the inside out into a pickle.

Using this analogy, Weaver suggests that it is the same with “making a disciple.” Disciples aren’t made, he suggests, by merely squirting a little “gospel juice” on people when they walk through the door on Sunday morning. No, disciples are made when people are willing

to immerse themselves in the “brine” of Christian community, the juices of the gospel message and its call to serve, to make a difference in the world. Disciples are made when we allow ourselves to be saturated with the word, the witness and the way of Jesus.

And, as with the art of making a pickle, this is an experience that we cannot help but “relish!”

The matter of our calling then is one that involves both coming and going. We have been called to “come and see.” We have been called to “go and serve.” We have been called to “go and makes disciples of all nations.”

Notice, if you will, the flow of our calling. It is one that leads from the personal encounter with Jesus to the social witness of service and disciple making. It is one that leads us from the inward experience of love to the outward expression of service. It is one that, ultimately, leads us “into all the world” in the name of the One who sends us out to change our world for good and for God.

Bill Eassum said it so succinctly and so well when he observed that, “Good news comes to us on its way to someone else.” We are called, you see, to be “conduits” of the compassion, power and energy of God’s transforming love. Even as we are being transformed by that love, so our witness of faith is intended to transform the world around us.

Like Abraham, like Moses, like the Disciples whom Jesus called, so we too, have been called:

Called to **“Come and See.”**

Called to **“Go and Serve.”**

Called to **“Go and make disciples of all nations.”**

We have our marching orders. Our direction is clear. Let’s move forward—together!

Amen.