

Follow Jesus, Teacher & Leader

Isaiah 9:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23 Fishers of people

Who is Jesus?

“Jesus was a Jew born to a woman in poverty in a time of social upheaval and political oppression. He knew human joy and sorrow. So filled with the Holy Spirit was he that in him people experience the presence of God among them.”¹

What did Jesus do?

“Jesus announced the coming of God's reign a Commonwealth not of domination but of peace, justice and reconciliation. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. He forgave sins and freed those held captive by all manner of demonic powers. He crossed barriers of race, class, culture and gender. He preached and practiced unconditional love; love of God, love of neighbor, love of friend, love of enemy, and he commanded his followers to love one another as he had loved them.”²

This is what is proclaimed by the United Church of Canada in one of the most recent creedal statements called ‘A Song of Faith’. Since September we as a congregation have been engaging different spiritual practices of discipleship. We first began by practicing daily prayer, followed that up with weekly worship, reading the scriptures and really diving into them. We spent December taking time to discern and listen. This month we are exploring how it is we serve and how we serve when we follow Jesus.

In the Gospel of Matthew today Jesus calls James and Peter and Andrew and John to leave all that they have known; leave it all behind and follow Jesus instead. Now why would they do this? What would cause someone to follow someone they didn't know and leave behind their support system, their livelihood and their security behind? Back in Jesus time word of mouth was how people got the latest news there weren't regular you know news reports or the internet and text messaging. News of the things Jesus was doing spread throughout the countryside through word of mouth and story. People heard stories of how he healed the blind man. They heard stories about how he fed 5000 people with only 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. People heard about how he

¹ *A Song of Faith*, A statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada, 2006, p. 6.

² _____, p. 6.

raised Lazarus from the dead and how he challenged religious authorities about their teaching. People heard about how Jesus went against convention; was seen with the people he shouldn't be seen with, ate with the people who are considered unclean, deemed outcasts by society. What becomes evident in the Gospel of Matthew today is that the disciples hadn't gone looking for Jesus, they weren't on this holy quest trying to find this great amazing person. They were simply doing their daily work; their jobs. Jesus came looking for them. "Jesus is the one who seeks out followers, learners, apprentices who do not have to qualify for such a relationship."³ All they need is a willingness to lay down everything else and follow. What motivated Peter, Andrew, James and John? What draws each of you in? What motivates us to follow Jesus and to give of ourselves to God and to all others? One's motivation can vary greatly. Think about your own. What moved you to follow Jesus? What brought you to faith? Why are you here today? What is it that you're seeking or longing for?

Paul Jones, a theologian believes that our motivation can be narrowed down to about 5 types of spiritual world views. Each world is motivated by something different based on one's understanding of who Jesus is, what Jesus did, what inspires them, what brings them hope and what brings them a sense of connection. Each world that he describes has an essential rhythm to it, a feeling associated with it, a state of Christology, which means an understanding of who Jesus is, and then all of that leads us to our understanding of what we believe salvation to be and how that looks for each of those different 5 worlds. Sometimes we assume that we all believe the same thing that we're all approaching things because of the same reasons. That's not true. I want to give you a sense of the 5 worlds and see where you might fit in:

World 1 is a world that has a rhythm of both separation and reunion. In this world Jesus is seen as a revealer, an evoker. It helps us to move from this state of feeling orphaned or alienated to then finding our salvation which is a sense of coming home and harmony where we are brought back into union;

World 2 has a rhythm of going from conflict to vindication. Often the feeling associated with this world is anger. We see Jesus as the Messiah or the liberator. We kind of find that state of being a warrior to bring new things to the world. A new consummation of what the world should look like and fight for that;

World 3 is one that moves from emptiness to fulfillment; where there's this feeling of a deep ache. We see Jesus as an example as a model for us someone who teaches us how to live. Sometimes we feel like we've been cast out and so what we long for what we ache for is a feeling of wholeness and belonging. That is where we find our Salvation;

In world 4 we move from condemnation to forgiveness. Often associated with the feeling of guilt, we see Jesus as our saviour and our redeemer who's going to save us and redeem us from our sense of guilt. We sometimes see ourselves as a fugitive and our salvation comes from adoption when we were adopted back into Jesus' world;

³ Troy A. Miller, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 289.

World 5 moves from suffering to endurance. It is a feeling of being overwhelmed. We see Christ as a suffering servant and companion. We might feel like victims and refugees, but our salvation comes from survival with integrity.⁴

Which of these 5 worlds do you connect with most? Do you feel guilt; feel an ache? Do you feel a longing? Do you feel anger? Do you feel overwhelmed? And is Jesus your rebel, your evoker, your Messiah and liberator, your example and model, saviour or redeemer or a suffering servant and companion?

When we fail to acknowledge and understand that all of these worlds exist we can end up like the church of Corinth that Paul was writing to; where fractures start to emerge, where conflicts arise and where we start to show allegiance to one particular leader because we see eye to eye with them, we agree with what they stand for. But Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wanted to address this issue, wanted people to remember that we don't need to pledge allegiance to one leader or another. It's not about the human leaders here; it's about our common purpose. Paul wanted to address the issue that when we emphasise our individual freedoms, we do that at the expense of the community. When we disregard people who are living in poverty we are doing this at the expense of community and sometimes we get so caught up in this members can puff themselves up against each other and that is not what Jesus called us to be about. Paul reminds the community of the importance of having a common purpose and living in accordance with that purpose. He doesn't want people to compete. Paul then gives us his image of a body. He uses this image to help the various communities understand what it means to have a common purpose. He reminds them and us that if the hand is off doing one thing over here while the feet going this way and we're moving in different directions there is potential of hurting ourselves and others. What happens if our hand is waving in our face gets in the way? What happens when our feet trip on something and our hand is behind our back? Each part of the body, each community that follows Jesus has a specific call, purpose and gift. Each individual inside each of these communities has a particular gift and call, but the call, the gift needs to be used for the common purpose; to build up the rest of the body, to work together to bring to this world what God intended. Our common purpose is God's work in Jesus Christ of reconciling the world and bringing peace to it. Diversity is a strength. Our differences help us come to a deeper understanding especially when were willing to sit in deep darkness together.

This is the week of prayer for Christian unity which I think fits beautifully with Paul's call to unity. When we believe that our needs in our thoughts and our ways are the right way or the only way that's when we run into trouble and that's when we end up in conflict. "Strongly held views on such issues as faith and belief can lead people to reject those who have different views resulting in the breaking of fellowship with them; even to condemn them."⁵ I am sure each of us have experienced this at some point in our life when we've met another Christian who has judged

⁴ W. Paul Jones, *Theological Worlds; Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 42-43.

⁵ Harry B. Adams, *Feasting on the Word*, p. 281.

us for the way we live out our faith. Maybe we have judged them in the way that they've lived out their faith, but if we remember that at the core we are all called to love as Jesus has loved us. That is the common purpose that will bring us together instead of dividing us. We see in history how things keep getting pulled apart because we disagree on one little thing.

If we believe that the coming of God's reign is a Commonwealth not domination and that is a reign of peace and justice and reconciliation; what is it that we are doing to bring peace justice and reconciliation to this world? Are we aware of our own pitfalls and the barriers that we build up to prevent us from living the mission in this world? Or the barriers that protect us when things get uncomfortable or difficult. Does our desire and our addiction to certainty and satisfaction prevent us from dropping our nets and following Jesus? Does our need for certainty and satisfaction prevent us from listening to other points of view or appreciating other faith traditions or non faith traditions and seeing the wisdom in all? If Jesus cross barriers of race, class, culture and gender how are we too crossing these barriers? We strive through our statement of welcome and inclusion to do this but it's much more than that. What do we need to reconcile because of our harsh judgments or own propensity to place our allegiance with one teacher over another because we like what we hear? What do we want to be part of? And how will we continue to live out our call of discipleship in this new year? What relationships do we need to reconcile? What work are we as a congregation and as individuals being called to do to bring peace and harmony to this world?

I hope in this week that you take time to pray to worship and to serve for our belief also needs to be lived out in action. So, go out into this world and work for peace and justice that is our call and that is what we can do together. Thanks be to God. Amen.