

The Calling II – the sequel
Matthew 4:12-23 Jan. 23, 2011

I. Here's a little test.

A. There is a major discrepancy between the scripture we read last week and the scripture we just read.

Does anyone remember last week's scripture well enough to reveal to us this discrepancy?

The difference is in how Peter received his calling.

1. Last week from the gospel of John we read Peter's calling happened this way:

The next day John [the Baptist] again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?"

They said to him,

"Rabbi, where are you staying?"

He said to them,

"Come and see."

They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah."

He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said,

"You are Simon son of John.

You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

2. Just to remind you, today we read:

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.

And he said to them,

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

- B. Now this not a really significant difference; I mean, it really doesn't change the overall message of the gospel, but the reality is there are major differences between the four gospels, especially between the synoptic gospels and the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John.
 - C. But even between the synoptic gospels, [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] so called because they are so in synch or so similar, there are numerous discrepancies.
 - D. But think about it, that's one reason they are all in the New Testament. If they had all been the same, the editors of the New Testament would have only put in one of them. It would have been redundant and silly to have included 4 identical gospels.
 - E. But what we have are four different gospels written in four different time periods, in four different geographic locations, to four different groups of people with four different spins or purposes for the gospel.
- II. Is this a problem or a blessing?
It depends on how you look at it.
- A. For some people it threatens the very foundation of their faith; after all, how can these be the literal words of God if there are so many discrepancies?
 - B. In the United Church of Christ, most people don't see the Bible as the literal words of God, as if God had dictated the words to somebody, or just dropped the Bible out of the sky; but rather most folks see them as words that were inspired by God but filtered through human frailty, finitude, context and prejudice. So that the Spirit inspired these folks to write but didn't tell them exactly what to write. For instance, I will tell you that ALL of my sermons are inspired by God, but as some of you will be quick to remind me – they are not always the words of God.

- C. The Bible is the writing of many different people who were inspired to share their faith; that is, their understanding of God and how God relates to the world.
 - D. In fact, I would say that just like the makeup of any UCC church, you're not going to find any two biblical authors who agree on everything.
 - E. So the fact that there are four differing accounts of Jesus life, mission, stories and ministry in the Bible, that's really kind of good news for us.
It means the church has always been a rainbow of beliefs, a symphony of inspired relationships with God.
- III. Today God called Pearl, Larry, Carol and Kevin to become a part of this faith community, and while I don't know the details of their individual faith positions, I promise you that they don't agree on everything; and maybe they disagree on some really important things.
- A. I bet that in this very room we all disagree on some very basic things.
For instance, for you -- which of the following is true?
 1. God is a being outside of creation.
 2. God is not a being, but rather the ground of being.
 3. God is an actual entity within the world.
 4. God is the summation of all that is.
 5. Just as love is not a noun, but rather a verb; God is not an entity but, a process.
 6. God is a symbol.
 7. God is a fantasy, but a necessary one, constructed for human interaction and development.
 8. God is a mystery beyond any understanding.

B. Now for some of you your understanding of God may change on a daily basis; or it may have changed a couple times while I was reading the options, but that's ok too, because I'd say that most of us are not here because of what we believe, but because of what we have felt. We have felt called – called to enter into a loving relationship with God, whatever God maybe.

1. And we are in a Christian church because what Jesus revealed to us about God and our relationship with God rings true to us.
2. And most of us are here in a United Church of Christ, because we like being in a faith community that is not homogenous, a community where everyone is not required to believe alike.
3. We're here because we like being part of a community where our perspectives are challenged and our faith is broadened by the diversity around us.
We find such environment to be fertile for spiritual growth.
4. We are here because we celebrate that there are 4 different and divergent gospels in our holy scriptures.
5. But this is a continuing legacy brought to us from the Jewish tradition which took the diverse writings of 5 or more authors and put them all side by side, in the first five books of the Bible, with all their glaring discrepancies.
They took the exclusive nationalistic writings of Ezra and Nehemiah and put them right in there with the inclusive anti-nationalistic writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the book of Ruth.
6. They did that because they too saw that getting a fuller understanding of God doesn't come from looking at things from just one perspective.
And they did it because they were humble enough to recognize that maybe they didn't have all the answers and that listening to people they disagree with may help to bring them closer to the truth.

- C. Falling in love with God -- through the prism of the scriptures and the diversity of faith that surrounds us -- is part of our calling.
- IV. It's all about being called.
- A. Pearl, Larry, Carol and Kevin didn't join the church today because they all believe the same thing.
 - B. You're not here today because you believe the same way as others in this room.
 - C. You're here because you have been called to be here.
 - D. It didn't matter if Peter got his invitation at Jesus residence or at while he was at work fishing.
The important thing is that when Jesus said "Follow me," -- he did.
 - E. It's the same for us, it really doesn't matter who we are or where we are on life's journey, God is calling us into loving relationships, with others and with God.
 - F. And once we've joined the party, well then it's our turn to direct the attention of others to God's invitation.
 - G. There are lots of folks who just don't feel invited.
There are folks who think that their weird ideas about God would never be acceptable.
There are all those folks who say they're spiritual but not religious.
 - H. Now concerning the 'spiritual but not religious folks,' there's a lot to be said for having a personal, one to one relationship with God;
but we come here every Sunday to celebrate that relationship and for those who just want to be spiritual and not religious, that is, not part of a faith community, well that's just sort of like partying by yourself.
It just doesn't quite get to it.

- I. Yeah, we're here, because we have been called, we've been invited to this party – so let's celebrate.
Let's stand and join now in "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."