

NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



SERMON November 20, 'Fruits—Peter' Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-11, John 1:35-42

This week we finish our follow up to the series on evangelism. We've been looking at figures in scripture who embody that whole notion of accepting an invitation to a deeper, broader, fuller relationship with God. They also embody the reality that simply accepting the invitation isn't the end. They also need people to come alongside them to walk them through the new experience, faith, or community.

We looked at two very different people, David and Ruth. Yet both showed us different facets of the same reality. Some called/invited them, and there were those who walked alongside them on their new path. Today we go different yet again. Today we consider Peter.

Peter has something David and Ruth did not. David and Ruth ushered into a new relationship with God, but not Christ. He hadn't yet come on the scene. Peter though entered into relationship with Christ Himself. Not the kind you and I have, a literal person to person relationship with Him. Called by Him...well, kind of depending on which gospel we read. But his walk began with Jesus and alongside Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John don't fully tell the call of Peter the same. This isn't a bad thing nor a problem. Their different vantage points and perspectives give us a fuller, richer ide of what all calling looks like and can be. To get to this we'll look first at why the gospels are told differently, and ultimately how they compliment rather than contradict each other.

The gospels were each written to a different group of people and at different times. They are all about Jesus, but they still have different backstories.

Mark: The earliest written gospel likely was crafted as eyewitnesses to Jesus were still alive. There is no birth/origin story because it wasn't necessary. People already knew Jesus was real, lived, and had a story attached to Him. For Mark it's more about Jesus' ministry, death, and ultimately resurrection.

Matthew and Luke: Came decades later. The people who knew Jesus were all likely dead and gone so they had a question to answer. Where did He come from? So the birth stories are included. But in the telling of the birth stories, Matthew and Luke remind us that they aren't just telling history, they are telling theology. The birth stories are intended to not just talk about a birth, but also that this birth was connected to the Divine so we better pay attention to the rest of the story.

Yet Matthew and Luke are told in some ways differently. They were written to different audiences. Matthew was written to a Jewish community and Luke to the Gentiles. Two very different audiences. So to fully communicate the history and theology they craft the telling to the crowd. They are honest, but also respecting the backdrop against which the story is told.

John: John is the outlier. His gospel is more symbolic and spiritual. Immediately we get this sense as he isn't worried about an earthly birth. He goes straight to the divinity and eternal existence of Jesus. John wants us from the very outset to see Jesus in glory, majesty, and power. His identity is clear and pointed. Which gives a hint into why John focuses the call of Peter less on the moment and more on showing us that he was inspired to the prophet John the baptizer who was foretold in the Old Testament to "prepare the way of the Lord."

There was an effort once to harmonize the four gospels into one work. It is called the Diatessaron. It didn't catch on. Each gospel has it's own theological perspective and audience. These similar but different perspectives are necessary and significant to give us the fullest picture of all that Jesus was and is. Trying to "cut and paste" them together can get

'clunky' because they weren't intended to be read that way. Each has its own "flavor" and they combine to a more whole sense of Christ.

Matthew and Mark are the most succinct with Peter's call. Jesus calls, he follows, end of story. The details aren't significant. Just the invitation and acceptance. And for their audiences that may have been sufficient.

Today we might ask some questions. Is it wise to blindly follow a stranger? Of course not! This is the beginning of stories about cults, people hurt and harmed and manipulated from blindly following the wrong person. We might wonder at the sanity of this choice. Fortunately, Luke give us more details in the same setting and moment.

Jesus is already teaching a crowd. He is clearly regarded as a reliable Rabbi so He's got some credibility. Enough that when some boats are coming IN from a long night of fishing, when He asks to use one as a better platform from which to teach they allow it. In the request He is not connecting with Peter and his brother. And Peter and his brother referring to Jesus as "Master" are already deferring to some sense of seeing Jesus' spiritual chops.

Jesus goes a step further in agreeing with our sense that evangelism is about connection, relationship, and credibility. He shows them compassion and grace. He knows they are tired, gross, and cranky from coming up empty after a night of fishing. He tells them to let their nets down on the other side of the boat. As if they hadn't already thought of that.....Still, they do and bring in the mother load of fish. Jesus here has now not only shown them a kindness, but also demonstrated He is clearly special, unique, a man set apart.

And they follow Him. This makes much more sense. Jesus has done the work to show them that what He has to offer is worth considering and devoting themselves to.

In John's gospel we see an entirely different picture. Peter isn't called by Jesus. He's called by his brother Andrew. John sees Jesus and points Him out to two of his own devotees encouraging them to follow Him. Upon doing so they spend time with Jesus in conversation (read building relationship and credibility). They are convinced of who He is and Andrew drafts his brother Peter into meeting Jesus as well. It is through the combined efforts of John and Andrew that Peter is ushered into the presence of Jesus.

This image gives us a fuller sense of evangelism and calling. It is a community effort. John prepared his followers to receive Jesus when He arrived on the scene. He inspires them, and instructs Andrew who then instructs Peter. The effort is all hands on deck when it comes to Jesus. None of us are exempt.

Additionally, we see that we are part of a chain in that community. Who is more important in Peter's call? John or Andrew? Neither is. Both are equally important in making sure Peter makes his way to Jesus. It doesn't matter if we're the one who is preparing someone to receive because of our witness over time and never sees the fruit, or the fortunate one who encounters someone at that pivotal moment when they are ready to accept Jesus or an invitation into a community of faith. Both are critical and we must be content with whatever role we are privileged to play.

So the calling of Peter is textured, but through the four gospels reveals a more complete sense of invitation and calling. Now we move to the coming alongside.

Peter walked alongside Jesus Himself. You can't more direct than this. Yet two things are evident in Peter and the other eleven disciples. They all endured hardship and stayed true to Jesus. They all missed the nature of what it meant for Him to be Messiah through His entire ministry. They only figured it out after His death and resurrection. In this there are two important lessons.

What helps us stick around when the choice we make gets difficult and perhaps we even question our sanity in making said choice? It's others who have made that same decision. The disciples walked with Jesus as He made enemies of both Jewish leaders and Romans alike. It wasn't a safe occupation. Yet they stayed with Him. To do this we need to be alongside people who when we are weak and doubting will bolster us and encourage us. They remind us that this is a right decision. They share their own stories that continue to convince them of their choice and remind us of our stories that have likewise convinced ourselves. This uplifting coming alongside is necessary and critical. Peter had it as part of the twelve.

At the same time all of them were mistaken about Jesus' nature as Messiah. They were raised to see Him as a conquering hero. He wasn't. Rome would endure past Jesus' time on earth. The political, societal flip the Jews expected wouldn't happen. The disciples passionately believed it would. But here we see that we can believe passionately and still be passionately wrong.

When we come alongside someone we have to do it with a dose of humility and grace. If we're leading, we need to remember that there are places where we are understanding wrongly. It doesn't mean we don't guide. It means we do so with openness that we may be incorrect, and model what it looks like to recognize this and shift our belief to what is correct.

When we have someone else come alongside us, we have to do it with a dose of questioning. Blindly accepting ideas or notions isn't what genuine faith is built of. Repeatedly we are instructed in scripture to "test" things. See if they are accurate. If not, we need to keep pushing to understand. Otherwise we swallow without question ideas that may well be wrong. We won't recognize it until, if ever, the person we believed changes their stance.

This doesn't mean we throw up our hands in frustration. We NEED each other. We need those who uplift and support. Those who guide and direct. So we come together. Yet we also humbly accept our limitations and misgivings. So we are open to one another to clarify and correct faulty beliefs. Coming alongside isn't easy or cut and dry. But it is fruitful when embraced fully and honestly.

As we finish out this follow up, I hope we see some things in the process. Invitation and coming alongside are necessary. They aren't cookie cutter approaches because every person is different with different needs and experiences. Love and grace amidst all of it is essential.

We are all, at different times, David, Samuel, Jonathan, Saul, Joab, Nathan, Ruth, Naomi, Peter, Andrew, and John. Discern who and what we are called to in the moment and we become part of the communal chain that is inviting the world around us into relationship with God through Christ. And we get the honor and privilege of one more thing. Just as God moment by moment is working through us to change the lives of others, so God at the same time is working in us to change us as well. And I pray you will trust me when I say that God is always working to change us for the better!