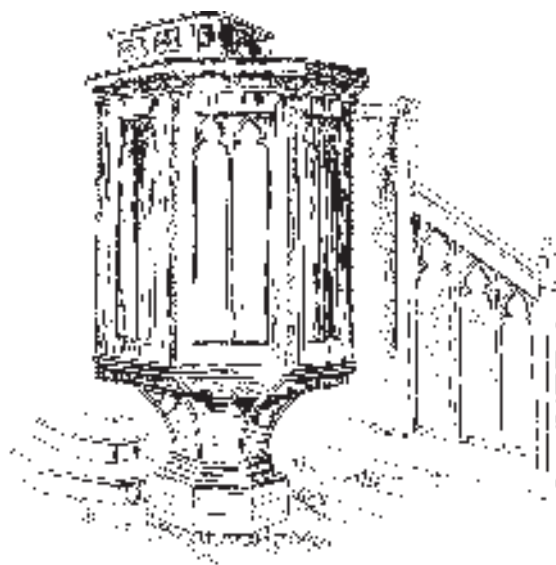


August 9, 2009

Westminster Presbyterian Church



Sermons

Getting in Step

by The Reverend Laurie Brubaker Davis

Mark 1:14-20

“You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and you shake it all about. You do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself around, that’s what it’s all about.”

Remember the last stanza of that roller rink classic, *Hokey Pokey*? (Don’t worry, I won’t demonstrate this one again.) “You put your whole self in, you put your whole self out. “ Why the Hokey Pokey here, now? Because our gospel lesson today is about four men: Simon and Andrew, James and John who decided to follow Jesus, two sets of brothers who put their “whole selves in” starting with their feet. And we know what happened next: Jesus turned their lives around, ultimately reshaping the world around. Yes, that what it’s all about.

But how do we get started on this journey of faith, and how do we stay on it? How do we stay in step with the One who calls to each of us, “Follow me”? As we ponder these questions about the call to discipleship, let’s focus on the response side of the equation today. We will find two important moves the fishermen made, that we also must make, if we want to follow Jesus.

We find those moves in God’s call to Abraham and God’s call to Moses. And here they are again at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel of Mark. The first is the way Jesus gives the disciples

the big plan, but is rather sketchy on the details. I call it the “But, what’s for lunch?” aspect of the way God works with us and through us. When those guys went off with Jesus, they knew they were moving in the right direction. Their purpose in life had just gotten a lot larger, and probably more exciting. But I’m sure they had plenty of questions and doubts, even misgivings, as well.

When God called Abraham and Moses, our scriptures tell us it happened the same way. God called them into a big part of a huge plan. But there was so very much they didn’t know, couldn’t know. Perhaps had they known, they might have not accepted the call at all. They might have thought it too hard, or that they didn’t have what it would take to pull off the job. But God sees the potential in us, even when we can’t. And God knows how good many of us are at psyching ourselves out. “Oh, I couldn’t possibly do that.” Or “I’ve never really done anything like that before!”

Yes, when God calls us into action, it can be very scary. Sometimes that’s a good indication that the voice you’re hearing is God’s, and not someone else’s. If it were just up to us, we’d get the full plan before we committed, wouldn’t we? No jumping ship until we know what we’re getting into, but as the theologian and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor has written, “If you really want to follow Jesus, do something that scares you every day.”

Eugene Peterson, in his book *The Jesus Way*, explains it like this: “When we follow Jesus, it means that we don’t know exactly what it means, at least in detail. We follow him, letting him pick the roads, set the timetables, tell us what we need to know, but only when we need to know it. . . . When Jesus says ‘Follow me’ and we follow, we don’t know where we will go next or what we will do next. That is why we follow the one who does know.”

Getting in step with Christ, definitely involves risk, there’s no way around it. But there’s something else here we need to look at. The second critical move that happens in this story, and in the call stories of Abraham, Moses and most of our biblical call stories, is the necessity of letting go—letting go of something or someone, in order to take up this new call.

Simon and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their boat, *and* their father. Yes, to get in step with Christ, we are called to let go. Another word for “letting go” is sacrifice. It is a major theme in Jesus’ teaching and in his life story. We don’t really like to hear about it; but, it comes up again and again in the gospels. For us today, I hear this second step not only when we are making major life decisions, like the fishermen in our story, but also on a daily discernment level. To follow Jesus day-to-day requires us to let go of certain ideas and expectations. Getting in step with God’s way calls us to decide what *not* to do on our “To-do” list—even some very good things.

This is not a story about men who were behaving badly and saw the light and repented of their sins. No. This story is not essentially about sin and redemption at all. They were doing something good, something expected and important: supporting their families, supplying their villages with fish. It was a choice to sacrifice one good thing, for the better thing. Or perhaps a new thing, that God has now readied you to undertake—even if it is scary.

Today in worship, we will be commissioning Benjamin Manuel, who has heard Jesus’ call to follow him into full-time Young Adult volunteer work as a Construction Assistant with the Presbyterian

Disaster Assistance and Homecoming Program. He knows something about this call, but plenty more of the details are yet to be revealed. And there is plenty he is leaving behind in order to take up this mission. Yet neither his life, the lives of those with whom he will work, nor Westminster, will ever be the same.

I have a story written by Roger Nishioka that helps us to see how this can work on the daily discernment level. This is a story about a young man named Jonathan, a 9th grader, and a teenager, about the same age, named Clarissa. And this is what he writes,

Throughout the weekend retreat, Clarissa had pretty much hung around the fringes. Part of the problem was the site. Clarissa was a paraplegic and wheelchair bound. She had a motorized chair, but not all the sites around the campus were easily accessible to her. It was more difficult for her to be a part of the retreat than for others. Beyond that, Clarissa's personality was introverted. She seemed to enjoy watching more than participating. I wasn't sure if her being in the wheelchair determined that for her or if her nature was simply to be more shy.

Throughout the weekend, young people and adults made numerous attempts to draw her in. She smiled, but would more often than not politely refuse. We had several nice conversations, mostly around mealtimes. She was attentive and interested, but would rarely share very much of herself. We all ended up asking her questions to try to draw her out, and even then, her responses were curt, brief, and not very revealing....

The retreat ended with a dance on the last night. It was the only activity, and everyone came. Clarissa, true to form, was sitting in her wheelchair along one wall. She was looking bored. Then to her surprise and mine, one of the young people in the group, Jonathan, a young, energetic, and somewhat immature ninth-grader, jumped out from the dance floor and yelled to Clarissa, "Let's dance!" Before she could object, he rolled her onto the dance floor. Jonathan was behind her, pushing her and twirling her. I could see her face, and initially she looked terrified. In the ebb and flow of the dance floor, when people realized Jonathan and Clarissa were dancing, we made a circle around the two of them with everyone cheering and clapping. Jonathan was obviously having a great time. Clarissa was less obvious. Then as the circle broke up and Jonathan and Clarissa continued to dance, I saw a genuine smile on her face and heard laughter from her for the first time the whole weekend.

In that moment, on that dance floor, the Kingdom of God was at hand. As Jonathan followed Jesus, feet first, pushing Clarissa into the middle of the dance floor at just another awkward, sweaty, exciting and scary teenage dance, before their very eyes, with their pounding hearts, it became holy ground. You and I know, those moments are precious and fleeting, yet they can reshape everyone who lets that experience inside them.

Jesus is forever inviting us to step further into his holy presence. Jesus is inviting us to get in step, or back in step, on this road that has no dead ends, this path that leads to life not only for us, but for all

of creation, in this life *and* the next.

What about you? What might be that step for you today? How is Jesus calling you to get in step and “Follow me” right now in August of 2009? What are your nets that you need to leave or let go of first? Are you willing to sacrifice your idea of what “has to happen” in order to let God’s way of bringing the kingdom nearer? What change might Jesus be calling you to make?

And this story also calls us to ask the same question of our community of faith. When we think about Westminster, what might be our nets that we’d rather cling to? What might be our boat that we need to let go of, in order to let Jesus lead us forward as the body of Christ we call Westminster?

*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?*

Are we willing to say “yes” to this call from Jesus? Are we willing to say “yes” first—with our feet and hands, our whole selves? Our whole lives?

Our final hymn turns around on its final stanza, from the voice of Jesus calling us to come and follow, to our response:

*Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I’ll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me.*

Can we let this be the dance of our lives? Can we let this be the song of our hearts?