

What would cause you to leave one person and follow another? Personality? Message? Good looks? References? Recommendations? Mannerisms? Invitation? Why do we change loyalties? These questions make for interesting sociological studies. I am sure that many political pundits are struggling with these questions today. How can I make my candidate look more attractive than the other candidate? How can I get people to follow me/him/her? How can I get people to change?

John and two of his disciples are standing around talking. Today we might say they were at the local coffee shop having their favorite latte, watching the world go by. As Jesus approaches and passes by, John makes a simple statement, *“Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”* His two disciples leave John and immediately begin to follow Jesus. We do not know how long they have been with John--at least long enough to be considered disciples. We do not know if they were there when Jesus was baptized--probably not or John would not have needed to point Jesus out. They have heard John’s message and have become disciples of John. Now, without hesitation they leave John and begin to follow Jesus.

John has been a good teacher. He has impressed them but he has also been honest with them. He is not the Messiah. He is only the one who has been called to prepare the way.

*“John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, make straight the way for the Lord.’*

*Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’*

*‘I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’” (John 1:23-27 NIV)*

Now the one whose way he is preparing is walking past and the two disciples begin to follow Jesus.

Jesus turns and asks them *“What are you looking for?”* And they simply ask where he is staying. He invites them to come and join him, *“Come and you will see.”* They do. They spend the rest of the day with Jesus. Then they continue their journey by inviting others to come and discover who Jesus is. *“We have found the Messiah.”* Their first task is to invite others to come and find what they have found.

Good news is something that needs to be shared. Today we are more apt to share bad news rather than good news. Whenever our prayer chain is mobilized it is usually not for good news. We have a need and need others to pray with us/for us. We are seeking intervention not sharing good news. However, these

two disciples of John now have good news to share and they share it: Andrew with Peter and Philip with the skeptical Nathaniel. They have found the Messiah, the one John has been speaking and preparing for. They have left John and are now poised to become disciples of Jesus.

I wonder if we have been wrong? What would you say if I asked you to stop inviting people to church? I am sure that it would raise some eyebrows. You would ask isn't this what we are supposed to do? (On a real bad day I would then ask why you're not doing it!) You may even think me a little crazy. How are we going to continue as the church if we don't invite people? How are we going to meet our budget if we don't grow? Wasn't the great commission our charge to go and bring people in to church?

I remember a woman stating at a meeting that she could never invite anyone to church because she didn't like me. She didn't get anything out of the service or messages and thus could not invite anyone else. (Wasn't sure why at the time, but later discovered she had issues with other members, too.) And, as I thought of her statement I began to realize she was right. She should not be inviting people to church to hear me; she should be inviting people to meet Jesus. I needed, and the church needed, to be sure Jesus was introduced when people came. There is a danger when a congregation is built on the personality of a pastor(s). The invitation was to come and discover Jesus. We have found the one the prophets and John have spoken of.

Let me ask a question. How many of you came to church this morning? It is not a difficult question. The answer, of course, is none of us! We came to this building to worship but we ARE the church. We could just as well be meeting in the restaurant next door, or the gym up the street—the church would be there, where we were/are. The New Testament never refers to the church as a building – it is the people of God wherever they are gathered. We though, have replaced people with a building. Our task is to invite people to Jesus. Come and see, we have found the Messiah—NOT to the building down the street!

Could this be one of the problems of church growth? We are inviting people to church rather than to Jesus? I was reading an article from the leader of one of the largest mega-congregations in the United States. According to the article he is beginning to admit that he was wrong. Entertainment, large numbers at services, mega-buildings are not the answer. They are getting a lot of people into the building but are not making disciples. He apologized for steering a whole generation wrong. The conclusion: It is time we begin making disciples again. Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, Leaving Church, tells of one who said to her of Christianity, “you make it too easy.”

I would say, “Yes and no.” The invitation is simple: Come and follow Jesus. It is by faith we are saved, not by works. But, the living out of our faith, discipleship, is difficult. Christ must come before Church. Our task is to “go and make disciples.” We are to invite people to Christ not to church. There is a difference.

Of course, our desire is for people to come and discover Christ and then stay and worship, serve and become a part of the community of FBC, Mountlake Terrace. We seek to be a place where the diverse gifts of the spirit can be lived out and where discipleship is taken seriously. We want people to come and work with us to change the world. We rejoice when people come and discover in us a place where they can live out the faith Christ has called them to. But, if it is not here that they find opportunities to serve, that must be okay also. We do not hold the monopoly on God. Our number One priority is to build up the kingdom of God. Our local congregation of believers must always be second.

I met with a young couple. They had asked me to come over as they had something they wanted to share. I knew what they were going to say, they were leaving the church. Well, they were not leaving the church; they were leaving the congregation they were a part of. They had grown up in this congregation, married in the congregation and were trying to raise their family there. But, they were not allowed to grow up. Most of the members still saw them in grade school. They were still viewed as “little John and Mary”. At 42 he was still a junior deacon (junior deacons could not vote in deacon’s meetings—they were deacons-in-training—he had been one for 12 years). His father, father-in-law and the rest of the “deacons” were not convinced that he was mature enough to be a “voting” deacon. They longed to serve but were not being allowed to use their talents. They had found another ABC congregation. There they were allowed to use their talents for God’s glory. It was sad for me but also a time of rejoicing as they had gifts that needed to be used and God’s kingdom must come before any local congregation/church.

John was not interest in kingdom building. *“Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”* He did not try to stop these two disciples from going after Jesus. He was only preparing the way and he had done his job, and done it well. John’s testimony was, *“He must become greater, I must become less” (John 3:30)*

When people discover Christ they too must be allowed to follow where Christ leads them. Our prayer is that it might be here at MLT, but if not, then that too must be okay. Our priority must be in serving Christ, in making Disciples of Christ. For it is he who is worthy of our glory and praise. It is him we must follow.