

In my monthly report to the deacons I wrote that a recent sermon of mine has troubled me. It was the one where I quoted a challenge from a friend: **that we need to discover where God is working in the world today and go and join God there.** My question, then as now is, “Where is God working?” Where can we see the Spirit of God moving in MLT/Lynnwood/ Everett/ Bothell, etc?

These are not the disciples you would expect Jesus to choose. Yes, Peter, Andrew, John and James are hardworking fishermen. They would have to be to survive and take care of their families. Fishing is not an easy life. They are not sitting by a quiet stream with a rod and line in the water watching the clouds pass by. This is work, their livelihood. After a long hard night on the water they need to sort their catch, clean and repair the nets and make sure the boats are in good repair. There is no guarantee of a catch. There is no guarantee of income today. But they are fishermen. They may have limited education, resources. They are everyday people!

I remember living in down east Maine in a village of lobstermen. Many of them would spend more time repairing their traps than lobstering on some days. When the catch was not as it should be the traps were the first things they needed to check more thoroughly. Peter, Andrew, James and John knew that one tear in a net could ruin a while days’ catch. A ripped net meant income lost. The days were long and the income uncertain. Here they are finishing up after a long night of fishing. Two are helping their father mend the nets. This is the scene as Jesus passes by.

As he passes by, Jesus simply invites these men to “follow me.” The Scripture tells us that they immediately left their nets and began to follow Jesus. James and John leave their father; maybe he is still sitting in the boat, mending the nets, and begin to follow Jesus. What would your reaction be if you were the father and your sons, your business partners got up and left the business without any notice and began to follow a new rabbi in town? We only know they immediately left and followed Jesus. It will not be long before the disciple who is recording this story will also leave his occupation and go after Jesus. Matthew, the tax-collector, is at work collecting taxes and Jesus passes by. He is given the same invitation as Peter, Andrew, James and John, “Follow me.” And we read in Matthew 9:9, “And he got up and followed him.”

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Here are some guidelines (can’t think of a better word right now). The first one is that Jesus must become the first priority in our lives. They left and followed Jesus. It is not that easy to leave everything, is it? We know that there must be more to the story, or we may hope that there is. We know the pressure of work, family, play, and society on our lives. We don’t have

time to list all the things we have to do--all the hats we have to wear—all the tugs for our loyalty. Yet, the call of Jesus is the same today as it was then, “Follow me.” The call to discipleship is not an easy call to answer. Leaving the past and moving into an unknown future is never an easy task.

The second guideline is that we must discover who Jesus is. By this I mean we must know who Jesus was, what he taught, how he responded to the various situations of life. What does he ask of those who would become followers? Our Wednesday Bible study has been using Phil Yancey’s book, The Jesus I Never Knew. (If you have not read this, borrow it from someone who has.) In it the author shares his misconceptions of Jesus. He shares what he has discovered as he read and reread the Scriptures and discovered for himself who Jesus is and Jesus’ call on his life. We live in a world alive with misconceptions of what Jesus taught and how his followers are called to live. It is only as we now begin to discover who Jesus is that we can begin to really serve as one of his disciples.

Then, we must discover where Jesus is working and go and join him there. The call is not to lead but to follow. The path is not all the same for everyone. Martin L. King, Jr. discovered his call was to work to change the racial inequalities of this nation through non-violence. He set us on the path but there is still work to be done. We have made gains but there are still more to be made. The work is not finished.

Mother Teresa saw the poverty in the slums of Calcutta and other cities around the world. Her call was to work in places most people feared to go and bring about hope, peace and love of God. Her work, too, is not finished.

We could go on. We have mentioned in our Mission Minute this morning Lauren Bethel and her work with those caught up in the sex-trade industry. There is Walter White, another of our ABC missionaries, who seeks on a global scale to bring about an understanding of Christians and Muslims. And, we could go on and on of those who, hearing the call of God in their lives have begun and continue various outreach programs around the world. None have finished their work—some have given their lives for the cause they believed in. They have followed where Christ has called them. And he still calls.

Back to my troubling question: Where is God leading today? There are days when I feel my vision is out of focus. Paul writes in I Corinthians 13, “*We see through a glass darkly.*” The vision is somewhat out of focus. Whenever I read this I think of my grandmother. I don’t think she ever cleaned her glasses. We would visit and I would notice how dirty they were. I would take them off, go and clean them and give them back. She would smile and say “thank you.” For a while at least her vision was a little clearer. When we would visit again we would repeat the process!

Maybe right now things seem a little fuzzy to us. We need someone to come by and clean or adjust the lens. We want to see things more clearly. Or, maybe, just maybe, it is supposed to be this way. Following Jesus is also a call of faith. Do you remember that the disciples often did not grasp where Jesus was leading at the moment? Luke 24:8 reminds us that it was only after his death that they remembered his words. Their journey was one of faith and so is ours.

Yes, Jesus must become the first priority in our lives. Yes, we must discover who Jesus is and what he taught and asks of those who would become disciples. We are his representatives. But then, we go out in faith. We believe that this is where God is calling us and we take our journey with steps of faith.

I believe we took two positive faith steps at our Annual meeting last Sunday. The first was our adoption of the Cedar Way Elementary School in Mountlake Terrace as an outreach program for 2008. Some of us have visited the school, discovered some of the needs that we can help with and are in the process of seeing how we can help meet those needs. We do not know how this will evolve but we have determined that this is where God is working and leading us as a congregation.

The second step is in our decision to hold a Vacation Bible School in 2008. It has been a couple of years since we have undertaken such a project but we have found the right curriculum, have gotten excited about it and are looking ahead to a great time this summer.

Each of these offer different challenges, and we are excited about both. Where they will lead, we don't know. But we walk with faith that we have heard the "follow me" of Jesus and are following where he is leading. Our invitation is for you to come and join us. To follow where the living Christ is leading us.

Where else may God lead us in 2008? I don't know. Maybe this is it for the coming year. However, we must be prepared for when God does come by and invites us to "follow me." We must be ready to go and follow. We must be ready and willing to leave behind our old ways and traditions and go with God into a new and wonderful adventure. It will be worth the journey – I mean, look at the list of needs for VBS – if that doesn't spike your curiosity and sense of adventure I don't know what will! Doesn't it sound like a great journey? Come and join as we seek to follow Jesus!