

5th Call Waiting/July 24, 2016

Before I start – I know some of you who may not use names like Jesus or even God to describe your spiritual path. I honor your journey. When I speak about Jesus I am talking about how he lived his life – not a particular faith. Jesus wasn't Christian after all. But he lived his life with a radical purpose.

In 1964, a social psychologist wrote a book about 3 of his patients - diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. All three of them said he was Jesus Christ. He brought them all together hoping they would see the absurdity of their delusions. To his surprise, he discovered each of them insisted that he was Christ. They also decided that the Christ-like thing to do would be to divide up the responsibilities of Jesus. One became the Christ of Salvation, another the Christ of Miracles, and the third the Christ of Service, they decided to form a "Society of Christs."

Here is another one - the doctor asked some patients who they were. One said he was George Washington, another Thomas Jefferson. The third patient said he was Jesus Christ. When the doctor asked him who told him he was Jesus, the patient responded, "God." Whereupon a voice from the other side of the room boomed, "I did not!"

Read -Mark 1:14-20

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: "Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message." Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed. A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

I usually hear this this story and start worrying if I really have what it takes to be a disciple. Like - if a clear call came tomorrow afternoon,

Could you get up from your chair and walk out the door, without keys or turning off the lights? Or leave the grocery cart in the frozen food -section at Target and set off to worlds unknown – actually that’s my story when Andy George called and offered me the position to be your interim pastor.

That is what happened -to the first 4 disciples. Someone they had never seen in their lives said: come follow me. It was not like they had a lot of faith, strength, courage or looking for a new job. Just ordinary people without a lot of extraordinary skills.

The amazing part of the story – is they went with him. Jesus called and they followed – (Pause). They sacrificed everything they had –

But Mark says - it really wasn’t that hard. Jesus called and they went. Period.

They did not know him. They were not waiting for him. They were probably not religious – No angst, no torn hearts, no looking back. They dropped everything - without saying a single word. They didn’t really decide.

It was like something happened to them, something almost supernatural beyond their control.

So it seems to me this is not a hero story -it is a miracle story.

Listen to some other miracles stories. Jesus said – **be made clean you have been healed of your leprosy – the man went on his way;**

stand up he said to **the paralyzed man**- the man stood up immediately took his mat and went home.

Go your faith has made you well - **the bleeding woman was made whole.**

Follow me - Jesus said and immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus.

So maybe this is a miracle story. It's not a story about **us to change** our lives and to leave everything behind and follow.

This is a story about Jesus who walked right up to a group of fishermen and worked a miracle, creating faith where there was not faith - creating disciples where there was none just a moment ago. (pause)

This is not a story about us. This is a story about the **power of God**, - however you define what is other than you - to not only call us but to fashion us into new people - who are able to follow.

It is a miracle - because if it is not - then it is fairy tale about 4 courageous fishermen who sacrificed it all to serve their Lord. But that is not what happened. **God acted, and the disciples left their nets, and followed.** Don't get me wrong - they gave up a lot and would lose their lives in the end - but if that is all it is - you miss the point.

And in that moment – when they turned to follow, the miracle happened: their lives went in a whole new direction.

We read this story too narrowly. I am not sure that following Jesus is always leaving behind everything. That is what it meant for Andrew, James and Simon and John, that is what it meant in their particular lives. **But it is going to be a different story for every one of us in our own particular lives.**

This holy and impractical Spirit - comes into daily life and calls us to follow, to be faithful, to live to our fullest, to love and give our lives away, not just once, but every day. The summons to follow comes every day, in one way or another – and we answer.

And then something amazing happens, we begin to know - we begin to understand about the path of Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, Buddha.

It **may** mean doing less – and not more. **It might be big**, no doubt about it, and other times it will be so small to even mention - **but it would be mistake to focus on our own part in the miracle of discipleship.** The One who calls us can be counted on to shape us - to follow. Whenever and however we follow this path - – time is fulfilled – immediately – and the God’s realm is at hand. **That is a miracle story if I have ever heard one.**

Here is another call story. At a Presbytery Meeting, Faith Presbyterian Church officially left the denomination.

The process to leave is emotional – political and financial. At the end of the letting go ritual, 12 from their church were invited to come forward – and Administrative Committee chair said something like: We thank you for your service; the many years you have been with us. We will miss you, and bless you on this new way God is leading you.

And then something like we are sad you are leaving us but understand God is calling you to a different place. Our prayers are with you.

The reasons they left is because they doubt the full humanity of those who are Gay and Lesbian, transgender - no ordination – no marriage. I just shook my head and answered a text on my Phone.

Until my colleague who is an ordained clergy and a lesbian woke me up. She explained to me with emotion - when I was forced to leave the church because of my sexual orientation no one thanked me for my service, or sent me out with a blessing. She said - the church took away 26 years of my call and 26 years of my pension and financial security – and no one ever offered any financial negotiations. No one offered me any prayers of good will for a journey outside the church. Are they saying their call is valid and mine is not? Since the church changed the rules who is in and who is out - she is officially a Pastor in the Presbyterian Church. – I was struck by the irony.

Faith Church interpreted that their call from Jesus was about exclusion It was about their choice to leave the church - Is that truly about a call from God? I don't think so.

In the motion picture Chariots of Fire, there is an unforgettable scene and line about call. Eric Liddell, a Scottish runner, a world-class sprinter, was in the 1924 Olympic Games. Liddell is the son of a minister. He's a theological student at the University of Edinburgh, preparing to be a missionary. But he can run, and to compete in the Olympics, he has to stop seminary in order to train. **The scene I will never forget occurs on a windswept hilltop, in Edinburgh. Liddell and his sister are talking about his decision. She is arguing that he ought to forget about running and listen to God's call to the mission field.**

And Liddell says the most powerful words of the movie: "I believe God made me for a purpose; but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure. To give it up would be to hold him in contempt; to win is to honor him."

And so Liddell decides to run. The purpose of the movie is that Liddell dropped out of the 100-meter dash because the event was scheduled for Sunday, and his strict Scottish Sabbatarianism would not allow it.

Coaches, politicians, teammates, even British royalty, tried to persuade him to run, but he would not budge.

Finally, a teammate, Harold Abrahams, who was Jewish and the British 400 meter champion, suggested that he and Liddell swap events. Liddell agreed and entered the 400, a very different and longer event. Abrahams entered the 100. Remarkably, both won gold medals. Liddell set a world record in the 400, which stood for more than a decade.

It's a great story and the best line in it, "**I believe God made me for a purpose: but he also made me fast.** And when I run I feel his pleasure. To give it up would be to hold him in contempt; to win is to honor him."

The call is about a miracle – not about a choice. It is about God – not us. It is about the power of something so much larger than us – it turns us around – changes everything.

This interim process is all about call and miracles. So I have some guide lines:

- A call comes with a sense of mystery and awe, not from an ego need.
- A call usually feels like it is coming from beyond yourself. It doesn't feel like your idea. It is the Spirit who is at work in you.
- A call is part of who you are meant to be.
- A call is consistent with who you are in the depths of your being. What is it you really want to be and do?
- A call is persistent. A call always seems impossible.
- A call is risky. - A call is countercultural.

Jesus challenged the social, political, and economic realities of his day.

Call is about creating a different future.

The title of my sermon is “Call Waiting”. You might guess the topic is about Cherokee Park’s “Call” – that is waiting. And our task over the next year – will be to explore it and redefine it.

I want to acknowledge that you (this congregation) and Tim have had a special call together – for a long time. Some of you longer than others. What I believe about call is that it changes. That it depends on where you are and what is happening at that particular time. Our call is shaped by – our gifts and talents and - what the world needs. Now – you might be wondering what gives me any authority to talk with you about your call/purpose at Cherokee Park United church. After all I hardly know you.

I recently served a dear congregation for 8 years –and left because I trust God has called me here to walk with you for a while.

I know how it feels to ponder meaning, purpose, and possibilities. It is emotional, unknown, and risky. To allow yourself to be in a place – where the call is uncertain – I get it.

But what I do know – and you do too – that where we are supposed to land - happens somehow. And it is not about us.

We have all been called somewhere new - again and again. I am certain that our call – has little to do with us -but about God, Spirit, something other than us.

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” –

Call is waiting for you and I. So is the miracle. Amen.