



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 22, 2017

On the Road: Follow Me

Matthew 4:12-23

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

Paul tips the truth well as he writes to the congregation at Corinth: "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The...power...of God!

Let me remind you where we were last week: Jesus had been at the Jordan...baptized...John witnessed and confessed that he, John, was NOT the one sent from God. And then, he points to Jesus and says, "Look, the Lamb of God." Two of his students follow Jesus. And Jesus says, "Who are you seeking?" They respond, "Teacher, where are you staying?" Jesus said, "Come and see."

They do, one is named Andrew. A day later, he goes and finds his brother and says, "We have found the Messiah!" He takes Peter to meet Jesus and Peter follows too. Recall it, a chain of witness of which we are a part this day too...Sunday, January 22, year of our Lord, 2017.

What happened is that students began to abide around and with Jesus, "to stay." We call them "disciples." And once a disciple stayed and linked life with a teacher, they would stick with him day and night, waiting for words of truth...watching...until the moment they were sent to carry on and to teach, be witnesses to others.

We get yet one more picture of what that looks like in the Gospel portion just shared. You know it well. (It is the Synoptic version of the call of the first disciples.)

Jesus preaches the shortest sermon ever heard:

"The time has come at last---the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your heart and minds and believe the good news." [A marvelous three point sermon 1) Time is now! 2) Turn around AND change! 3) Trust the good news! That's it!

Then, he calls---"Come and follow me." And they do! IMMEDIATELY. Four of them, two by two. It is only Mark that says the first two were "casting" and the later two were "mending." Likely a call to us to cast the seed of the word and to mend the world with our love!

Now, what does this mean for us? This congregation in Eastgate formed in Christ in 1956, 60 years ago?

This week and next, as we approach my 33rd annual meeting with you, I want to unpack what it means to be On the Road with Jesus, who said “Follow me” and has called us “Along the Way.” With four words: GATHER, ENCOURAGE, EQUIP, AND SEND.

GATHER. Being a disciple, a student, is to stay with Jesus. It is not turning up once a week for a course, or a sermon. It is a relationship. Being a disciple learner is not a quick fix, but a lifelong journey in which we are with Jesus and with one another.

Rowan Williams, once Archbishop of Canterbury, writes that discipleship is about being AWARE of the need to be changed. To recognize a need, for redemption, to get that in Christ forgiveness is full and free, and to keep on listening and watching and being open to the Holy Spirit. To expect new things!

Our Charter Members did not mumble along in their first year, they were about the work of risk... that began as they trusted one another and shared gifts to grow, love to share, and peace in the midst of what could have been failure. They were alert, attentive and built a worship space in a near circle with the Altar in the middle---out of the Center, life!

When we are here we are with God in Jesus and with one another, to grow and glow because we know that our deepest needs for wholeness and fellowship are met at the Cross. That’s why we make that sign, it is our brand, our mark of belonging, our birthright as the children of God.

This is our 2016 Annual Report. It is the “audit” of sorts of what it means for us who gather weekly for worship and renewal. I invite you to read and to highlight the places where that act of gathering has fed you. Note the events, the names, the actions of how we are after we have been with Jesus! Note that today, it takes 22 folk to serve+the Chancel Choir. That is the size of many congregations who began in 1956. And where are those we miss each week in our koinonia, our fellowship. Have we reached out to them and to those who have not tasted the goodness of our gathering?

Our Biblical identity as disciples is that we are in the company of Jesus and with one another. We are a deeply relational community and we must be cautious that no one leaves our gathering without knowing that they are valued. Look around you...reach out to someone new today.

ENCOURAGE. Faith, hope, and love are the fruit of time when we encourage one another. Can you remember the time, the times you have been encouraged here, found heart strength in prayer, a word of care spoken, an action of love at just the right moment, a prayer shawl, a phone call, a card, a name in a prayer, a prayer spoken aloud or in silence, a high five, the words of your Pastor saying, “All will be well.” Because we have been with Jesus and in Jesus we are in God forever!

Let’s get clear that sometimes there is a dark night or a brick wall; a troubled relationship...a time in which there is anxiety and fear in the face of change or times, dare we be clear, of national shift. And we forget for a time the goodness of God who we sing has the whole world in His hands.

To encourage is to learn the power of faith, hope, and love! Rowan Williams again:

“Hope, then, is not simply confidence in the future; it is confidence that past, present, and future are held in one relationship so that the confusion about memory—Who were we? Who was I? Who am I, and who are we?---become bearable because of the witness in heaven (That we live in God’s generous and glorious grace and that is never a deficit account!), a witness who does not abandon. This suggests that the Church needs to be marked by profound patience:

- patience with actual human beings in their confusions and uncertainties (even times of risk, see 1956);
- patience in an environment when so much seems to be unclear and in danger of getting lost; patience in the sense that we realize it takes time for each of us to grow into Christ. And if it takes time for us, then it takes time for the Body, the community, to grow overall. Hope and patience belong together. Only a Church that is learning patience can proclaim hope effectively.”

This is your 2016 Annual Report. Read it and pray it as a vibrant platform of strength and encouragement as we move into 2017. A time when your Council will lead in a process of strategic planning for our future. To take a space of time for mutual encouragement of where God has brought us into this time of change, succession management when our relationship as Pastor and people will change. Time and new days which will continue to see us as an community of renewal which will grow ever more faithful, ever clear in our commitment to be strong and resilient. Lifting high the cross of Christ and being with those who Jesus spent time with as those who would hear the word, feel the love and learn to serve in His name.

This is the day the Lord has made for rejoice and giving thanks for time to gather and to encourage.

As God will, next Lord's Day, an annual meeting and the words equipped and sent.

But for the time being, hear the voice of Jesus say, "Will you come and follow me? Come and see. Stay with me"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.