

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, February 17, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

“DISCOVERIES ALONG THE WAY”

Luke 5:1-11

This year we are preaching through passages from Luke’s Gospel. Two of Jesus’ best-known parables are found only in Luke’s Gospel – the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. Now Luke was a fine writer, very interested in detail and accuracy. Archeological discoveries over the past century have confirmed many historical details in Luke’s writings, which include the Gospel and the Book of Acts. Luke was not only a writer; he was a physician who travelled with the apostle Paul on at least one missionary journey. Luke knew Paul; and he would have known Peter, as well. And though Luke was not a follower of Jesus during Jesus’ lifetime, he learned about Jesus’ life from those who did, people like Peter. The bottom line is that we can really trust Luke’s writings.

Now Peter figures prominently in today’s Gospel reading. Here he is called Simon, which was his name before the Lord changed his name to Peter, meaning “the rock.” Today we read, ‘Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.’ Luke 5:11.

Today it is common to refer to Christians as “followers of Jesus.” Maybe that’s a good thing, for the name “Christian” can be misused or misunderstood. We call some people Christian who probably aren’t. In any case, when we think of ourselves as “followers of Jesus” we are going right back to our New Testament roots. Peter and James and John would not have called themselves “Christian”, not at first. They would have said, “I’m a follower of Jesus.” There is value in thinking of ourselves that way. It is term which implies action, as well as reminding us that our attention and our faith are focused on Jesus. It also sets the tone and direction of our lives. Yes, we walk with Jesus and he with us, but to say that we are following Jesus leaves no doubt that he is in charge and not we ourselves. Jesus is Lord, our Lord.

What I want to say today is this: As we follow Jesus we make wonderful, life-changing discoveries. Certainly that was true for those early followers of Jesus. Every day was an adventure. Every day they saw or learned or did something new as they followed the Master. In fact, even before Jesus formally called them to follow him, they were making these discoveries. Today’s passage reveals some of those wonderful, life-changing discoveries, discoveries which are true for followers both then and now.

First, as we follow Jesus, we discover that his word is true and effective.

Jesus taught the crowds on shore from Simon’s boat. When Jesus finished teaching he said to Simon, “Take the boat further out and throw out your net for a catch.” Simon said, “Master, we

have worked all night long, but have caught nothing. Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets.” Don’t you catch the hint of weariness and doubt in Simon’s words? “Yes, Jesus you are a carpenter and masterful teacher, but we’re the fishermen here. We know when and where to catch fish. We know it’s no use, but if you say so, we will let down the nets.” But then to Simon’s surprise, they caught so many fish that the nets began to rip. They called the fishermen in the other boat to come and help them. And the great catch filled both boats.

Simon discovered that Jesus’ word was true and effective. Jesus’ word was to be obeyed, not doubted. Jesus’ word could be trusted and acted upon without question.

That is what we discover as we follow Jesus. We discover that his word, recorded in Scripture, is true and effective. When Jesus teaches about God’s Kingdom, when he tells us about the nature of God, when he calls us to take up a cross and follow and even expect persecution for doing so, when he teaches us about judgement and salvation, about heaven and hell and eternal life, and so much more, his word is true. We need not doubt his word, his promises, his warnings, his blessings. They can be trusted. For they come from the one who is the truth, Jesus Christ. And when his word is obeyed wonderful things start to happen, in our lives, in the church, in the world.

Jesus proved the truth of his words by the works he did. His miracles were never done just for their own sake, but to validate the words he spoke. Once he said to a paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven”, and then to prove that the man’s sins really were forgiven, he said to him, “Take your pallet and get up and walk,” which he did. Jesus’ works always proved the truth of his words. Jesus’ words received God’s eternal stamp of approval when the Father raised him from the dead to live forevermore, as Lord of all. Jesus’ words are true and effective. That’s why he could say remarkably and truthfully, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

It’s true not just for Jesus’ words but for all of God’s words. Those of us in mainline Christianity are sometimes taught to keep the Bible at arm’s length. It’s almost as if God’s word is to be doubted or at least questioned, because the secular, modern world might give us a better truth. But the more I preach and seek to live God’s word, the more I discover that it is true and powerful and trustworthy. God’s word doesn’t always have to be explained, even though I try to expound and apply God’s word each week. But in just reading or hearing the right word of God at the right time you discover that it has a power in and of itself, quite apart from any explanation. The greatest example of that may well be the 23rd Psalm, which pastors fall back on in so many pastoral situations.

One day on the Sea of Galilee, Simon Peter made a great discovery about Jesus’ word. And we do, too. As we follow Him, we discover the truth and the power and the effectiveness of his word. “Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Secondly, as we follow Jesus, we discover that he covers the gap.

When Simon Peter saw the great catch of fish, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man. Peter was ashamed of himself for doubting the Master’s word.

Peter realized that he had put a gap between himself and the Holy One of God. Peter didn't feel worthy of being in Jesus' presence.

When I get a new gadget or piece of furniture, I have found through hard experience that it's best to follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembling it. If I toss them aside and say, "I don't need this, this looks easy," I wind up in a muddle, ashamed at the mess I've made. I'm even too embarrassed to call the 1-800 number for help. I have to take it apart and go back and follow the instructions. My discovery from such episodes is that it's always better to follow the maker's instructions carefully in the first place.

A gap opened up between Holy God and unholy humans; between the sinless one and sinners. It was and is caused by humans doubting and disobeying the Creator's word. That's been the downfall of the human race, from the time of Adam and Eve. The Creator gives us instructions for blessedness, fruitfulness and happiness, but we think we know better and go our own way. We become separated from God and even try to hide from him for fear of punishment. The Bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory; furthermore, that the wages of sin is death, which means that the gap between humans and Holy God becomes permanent in eternity. But here's the amazing thing. God in love takes the initiative and covers the gap. You see, Peter didn't act to cover the gap; Jesus did. Jesus reached across the gap and said to Simon, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people."

Suppose someone sins against you. You say, "Well, yes, I'll forgive if she comes to me and apologizes." You know what – you'll likely be waiting a long, long time. If reconciliation is to take place then you, the offended party, must take the first step. You must go to the person, and say, "I am willing to forgive if you are willing to accept it. Let's set things straight." That's God's way. He takes the initiative and reaches across the gap to forgive, to heal, to save, to take away our fears. That's the story of our salvation. Into the gap between holy God and sinful humanity, God put the costly, bloodied cross on which Jesus suffered and died.

Religion tells us that we must do something to cover the gap, but Gospel tells us that God himself covers the gap. We Christians are not religious people; we are Gospel people, people of the Good News. The Gospel tells us that God comes to us, before we go to him. He sent his Son to be our sin-bearer, our Saviour, our healer, our source of forgiveness and hope and eternal life. We only have to put our full trust in this One whom God has given us. Christ comes to us and says, "Don't be afraid. I love you. I suffered and died and rose again for you. I am your Saviour. Trust me. Trust my word." "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." As we follow Jesus we discover that we don't have to cover the gap, because he does. It's not that we first love him; but that he first loves us. We don't go first to him; he first comes to us. He covers the gap.

Finally, as we follow Jesus we discover that we have a mission.

Jesus reached across the gap and said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Jesus not only saved Simon and the others; he gave them a mission. They had been catching fish, fish that would soon die as they were brought to shore. But from now on,

they would be catching wounded people who were dead in their trespasses, bringing them into the realm of God's love and grace where they would have life! And the qualities required to fish would serve them well in their mission – qualities of patience and perseverance and cooperation.

Jesus has reached across the gap to save us, and now he gives us, his church, a mission, which we discover as we follow him. Our mission is to gather people for Christ and His Kingdom, through preaching and teaching, through acts of love and care, through sharing our faith and experiences of faith. Our mission is to kindly catch and bring people to God, so that they might live and live eternally. It is a personal mission and a cooperative mission. It's the church's mission in every generation, one we must not overlook. This mission requires Christ's guidance and the help of Holy Spirit whom he has given us. The Lord leads us and tells us where to cast the net. He gives us patience for the times when the catch is small, but also surprises us with times when the nets are full. The Christian life is not just sitting in a comfortable pew, and rejoicing in our blessed assurance of heaven. That is wonderful. But as we follow Jesus, we discover that our mission is to catch people for God's Kingdom, even as we ourselves have been caught by His love and grace. Peter and the other followers were greatly devoted to this mission. May we and the whole church be as just as devoted today to the great mission which our Lord has given us.