

April 19, 2015

COME, FOLLOW ME

Matthew 4:18-22

I want to begin with the story of what is called The Six Mile Sermon. Every Sunday morning a farmer saw his neighbor drive by in his one-horse buggy at about the same exact time: a few minutes past 10:00. His neighbor lived up the road about a half a mile from his place, and the only time he ever saw him in his buggy was on Sunday morning. Oh, he'd seen him in his wagon, now and then, during the week. But on Sundays, it was in his buggy, and he was all dressed up.

They never really spoke to each other. He would nod when the neighbor tipped his hat. But he didn't really have much to do with the other man, until, one day, they ran into each other about six miles up the road, at the feed store in town. The neighbor struck up the conversation – something about how it was good to see him there – and the farmer was curious. “Where are you going every Sunday morning at 10 am in your buggy? It must be pretty important! You never miss a week!” “I tell you, friend. It *is* important...How would you like to come along with me next Sunday and see?”

Well they made arrangements, and the next Sunday morning, the neighbor picked up the farmer, and they drove together into town. The neighbor took the farmer to Church, to worship with him at the Methodist Church. To make a long story short, the farmer liked the experience. He discovered he'd been missing something. He joined the Church, became a strong part of the fellowship, grew in grace, became a leader, and said he owed it all to the fact that every Sunday, his neighbor preached a six-mile sermon for him!

You see, your going to Church is a message to your neighbors. If they see you glad to make that trip; if they realize that there is a good practice going on; if they notice you doing something special, they may eventually feel like they've been missing something. And they'll want to have what you have.

But...even better is to notice that they might *not* have what you have; that they are, in fact, missing something, a blessing, an inspiration, a grace, salvation... and offer to share it. Invite them to worship with you. You could tell them that your church has a special event coming up, or, that something new was recently done to the building or grounds and they should see it. You could tell them that your church has this wild and crazy pastor who likes to preach his way through a whole Gospel verse by verse; it's interesting, come and hear what he has to say. You could say, simply, that you love your church, come and worship with me! You could even say that you *like* the pastor....just don't lie!

Jesus simply said, “*Come, follow me!*” (Matthew 4:19) He didn't preach to them first. We have no clues as to what sort of knowledge they had of Jesus before this passage. But Jesus didn't quote Scriptures. He didn't examine them to see if they agreed with Him on every point of doctrine and belief; He didn't worry about whether or not they were qualified; He simply called them. To Peter and Andrew, he not only invited them to follow Him, he presented a vision – “*I will make you fishers of men!*” They would eventually draw people to Christ. But Jesus didn't present any expectations other than that of following Him.

Invitations... In Pecatonica, the Church had a float in their hometown day parade. Actually, it was a hayrack with several rocking chairs and a few people sitting on some; and a sign on either side that said, "The Pecatonica United Methodist Church Rocks!" Tim, my son, was driving the truck that pulled the hayrack. As we passed along the way, he saw a couple of girls who were members of the church sitting near the curb, and he called out to them, "Why don't you join us?" His invitation drew the girls, and they ran up to the float, andclimbed into the truck with Tim!

Sometimes our invitation draws people to *us* rather than to Jesus. But, you know what, that's a good beginning!

Sometimes the invitation needs to be fairly specific, like, "Why don't you join us...by getting on the hayrack in one of the empty rocking chairs?" When you invite someone to worship with you, be sure that it's at the United Methodist Church on Kahler Road. And be sure you let them know that worship is at 8:15 and 10:45, and, that you'll be glad to sit with them in worship. You don't have to convert them first. Let the Holy Spirit do His job. You don't have to explain everything there is to know about being United Methodist – although you should be able to tell them something. And you don't need to explain our worship service. Though it might help them to know that we don't put anyone on the spot, we don't get too enthusiastic, we don't speak in tongues, at least not since I've been here, and we hardly ever have an altar call. Of course, be sure to tell them that the sermons are never too long.... Right? ☺

But be invitational... More than once.

The four men called to follow Him weren't the only ones Jesus called. But they were the first. And they responded *immediately!* How immediate is your discipleship? Who could you invite? Here's a suggestion: Use the FRAN Plan – Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, Neighbors. Don't invite someone who hardly knows you, invite friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors... people in your *network*. Don't worry about turning them off. That's their problem. You should want them to have what you have! You have the cure. You know they need it. Shouldn't you *want* them to have it too?