

THE MESSAGE**March 7, 2010****Luke 9:1-6****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller*****Nourished: Miracles and Ministry***

Picture this. You're at a church picnic at a beautiful park. People everywhere are enjoying their time together, a few games going on here and there and food, and food, and more food everywhere. Did I mention? It's a Lutheran picnic. There's a big swimming pool and standing on the edge of the pool is a 7-year-old looking for his parents. The boy asks one of the fathers standing nearby if he'd seen them. The father sees them across the pool, picks-up the 7-year-old and throws him into the deep end of the pool and yells, "They're on the other side. Go get 'em."

Now it seemed like good, innocent fun to the parent. Problem is the 7-year-old doesn't know how to swim. Thankfully, there is another parent in the water who helps the 7-year-old to the other side.

Question: ever feel like that, like you've been thrown into the deep end, told to get 'em, but you don't know how to swim? Looking at our Bible reading for today, I wonder if that's how the disciples felt.

(Read Luke 9:1-6)

The disciples have been following Jesus. They listened to him proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. They watched him heal the sick and raise the dead. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and said, "Okay, boys, it's your turn. I'm sending you out to do the very things I've been doing. Go get 'em."

These guys are fishermen and tax collectors, ordinary people like you and me. Here's Jesus, throwing them into the deep end, so to speak. How could they possibly go from ordinary guys to extraordinary missionaries? How could they make the journey from one side to the other?

That's the question for us here this morning. We know that we are Jesus' disciples. We know that we are called, each one of us, to go and make more disciples. We are called to be missionaries, sent out daily to share God's love everywhere we go. We know what we are supposed to do for Jesus but we struggle to do it. Or is that just me?

It's not that we don't *want* to do it. I wonder if it's because we don't know *how* to do it. Like being thrown into the deep end of the pool, not knowing how to swim. We might describe our calling in Christ as "an uncomfortable sinking feeling!"

Those first disciples did go as Jesus commanded them. And they had remarkable success or we wouldn't be here today. How did they do it? How did they get from here to there? I'd like to suggest to you a four-step-process:

Step one

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (NIV). Each one of Jesus' disciples is a hand-crafted masterpiece, made by God for the purpose of doing God's work.

Even before the disciples were born, God knew them and designed them for his purpose in the world. They lived ordinary lives, learning their fathers' trades and going about their daily life just like everyone else until the day Jesus called them saying: "Come, follow me."

Step two

Every Jewish male knew exactly what those three words meant. When a rabbi selected a follower, those were exact the words he used. This invitation was an honor. Rabbis' would choose only the best and the brightest only those would could make the cut for the "A Team." They would have memorized the entire Old Testament, from Genesis to Malichi. That was just the start. If you were not chosen by a Rabbi to follow him then you went home and learned the family trade or family business.

But notice what's so interesting about Jesus' invitation. His disciples weren't the best or the brightest. They were the "B Team." They were doing the family trade. They didn't have to first memorize anything. They were common laborers - anybodies. Jesus chose the common, ordinary, everyday people to be his disciples.

"Come, follow me." Those words must have rocked the disciples' world. They would have known exactly what was being asked of them. They were being called to leave their old lives behind and to literally follow their rabbi -- to sit at his feet, learn from him, and watch what he did. Every faithful disciple knew that the goal of following a rabbi was to learn from the rabbi, and eventually do what the rabbi did. And that's what happened next. These common, ordinary, everyday guys followed their uncommon, radically different rabbi.

He taught them what it means to live in a relationship with God. Jesus proclaimed a message of God's love and forgiveness in people's lives. Jesus did miracles, too, but the real focus of his work wasn't the miracles. The real focus was his message that God's loving reign had come to earth. The miracles verified the message. And the disciples took it all in with wide-eyed wonder.

Step three

The day came. The day came when Jesus turned to his disciples and said, “It’s your turn. It’s time for you to go and do what I’ve been doing.” That’s what disciples are groomed to do. They do what their rabbi does.

I wonder if the disciples felt like they had been thrown into the deep end of the pool and didn’t know how to swim. After what they had seen Jesus do, they had surely given up on the notion that they were supposed to do the things that he was doing. I mean he could walk on water, forget about swimming. They were just ordinary guys, after all, and Jesus was unlike anyone they had ever met. Jesus sent them out to do the impossible.

Here’s the kicker. Jesus didn’t send them out unequipped. He taught them and modeled for them exactly what to do. He gave them two important things: power and authority. His power and his authority.

Step four

They went. They actually took a step of faith. They did what Jesus sent them out to do. They went out proclaiming the good news of God’s kingdom and healing the sick. They shared God’s love with others in word and deed. And the world has never been the same. That’s how these ordinary guys got from here to there.

All they took with them was their faith, nothing else. They didn’t need anything else. They trusted that God would come through. God would have to come through because they didn’t have anything else to fall back on.

So, what does this mean for us? How do we get from where we are to where Jesus is sending us to go? I would suggest that our journey is very much like the journey of those first disciples. A four step process.

Step one

We are God’s workmanship, hand-crafted for good works that God has already prepared for us to do. You and I were made for doing God’s work in the world.

Step two

We are on the B Team. We have been chosen and called to follow the Master of masters not because we are extraordinary, but because God’s love is extraordinary. We are on Jesus’ team and nobody is to be sitting on the bench.

Step three

Follow Jesus. Hang out with him daily and learn from him. Come to worship regularly, join a life group, get involved in the work of the church. Jesus lived in the light of God’s grace and love daily. He brought God’s light and love into this darkened world. He ushered in the kingdom of God in word and deed. And we are to do the same.

Step four

Go, take a step of faith and go. Jesus has given us his power and his authority to go and be his witnesses. To share God's love and grace with others to bring hope and healing and new life where ever we happen to be.

That means we need to make one huge change in our lives for this to work. Now, I need to confess. This change is not easy for me to do. So if you struggle with this, I understand. Here is the change we need to make -- *we no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus...* There is no room for selfishness on the B Team. That's why those early disciples had such success. They lived for Jesus. Who are you living for?

When it comes to doing God's mission in the world, it really isn't *what* you know, but *who* you know. We know Jesus and he knows us. So no matter where you are on this journey of faith and good works, take that next step. Jesus is sending you and me to go and do what he did.

For me, it can be summed up this way -- in a song I learned a long, long time ago. (*I ended the message by singing this song...*)

*I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though no one join me, still I will follow;
Though no one join me, still I will follow;
Though no one join me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.*

*The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.*

And yet the decision isn't mine to make. Jesus has decided who is on his team, which includes you and for me. So please - for Jesus' sake - take the next step. Amen.