

Sermon 22.06.26

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Galatians 5: 1, 13-25, selected

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Luke 9: 57-62

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

SERMON

“ What does it mean to authentically follow Jesus?” If you listen to the “Ing” podcast, you’ll recognize that that’s how Ben starts every episode.

What does it mean to authentically follow Jesus...

Jesus says - Follow me, and the response? Yes, but FIRST...

Yes, yes, I’ll follow you Jesus, but first let me...

What does it mean for us today? What *does* it even look like to follow Jesus? Questions worth sitting with.

Our gospel story today comes at a pivotal moment in the gospel of Luke. It’s the beginning of nearly 10 chapters that focus on Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. The whole middle of this book revolves around themes and questions like: What does faith look like? What does it mean to be a disciple? The emphasis is on the Way, on formation and transformation. The destination matters, of course, but the emphasis is on the journey, asking over and over what living into our faith looks like.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS?

I will follow you.... I’ll follow, but first...

Jesus is clear - the fears, the lack of trust, the worry at tasks undone - don’t let them get in the way. Choose to follow.

As I’ve sat with this passage, seeing it as the beginning of this long journey of teaching, I’ve come to see it as not a zero sum game - here’s your moment, are you going to follow? If not, your life is doomed. I’m coming to see it as an invitation Jesus offers over and over.

Seeds planted, tended, nurtured...Follow me...follow me...follow me.

In the past 8 weeks here at UMC we’ve heard from each of the six individuals who have made the choice to join this fellowship. We’ve heard little bits of their faith journey - snapshots along the way of choosing to follow Jesus.

The journey with Christ, the journey of faith - it is here, in our ordinary lives.

Ross talked about shedding his fundamentalist childhood faith and finding myth as an entry point back into an authentic journey with the One who beckons - follow me.

Similarly, Bekah had a crisis of faith in college, trying to reconcile science and religion, needing the space to question everything. That journey through the wilderness has led her here, following Jesus in ways that allow all aspects of life to be held together.

Hoyeon spoke of fearing God when he was young, seeing the journey through the focus of avoiding sin. He realized he didn't really know how to love others. Through a mission trip to Japan, Hoyeon learned that God guides him using love.

What beautiful stories of journeying and following!

In the 10 chapters of Luke that focus on the narrative of the journey to Jerusalem, we have lots of stories we don't find in the other gospels. Parables and stories that show us how counterintuitive the way of discipleship is. Jesus calls his listeners, calls us to inhabit the world in a radically different way.

Again and again his stories show how the kingdom of God doesn't function according to all the rules and regulations society offers us.

Following Jesus means we have to re-learn everything. And that choice to follow might ask much of us.

The journey is where the stories of our lives happen.

As a child Amy loved the stories of the OT - the strange and larger than life adventures. As she grew, she saw that being a christian meant following Christ and it became important to find a tradition that valued following the example of Jesus - the pursuit of peace and love above power or wealth.

Sarah watched her Mom serve Christ through her work as a dentist - helping those in need. The ultra competitive nature of school had Sarah following Jesus through intense study. It was when she got involved in a campus faith group in college that she saw another way - challenging her priorities - she watched fellow believers choosing to pray for others, before studying. Caring for others around her, building relationships became a way for Sarah to follow Jesus.

Diane shared a couple of beautiful images - literally learning her prayers by crawling, slowly crawling up the stairs behind her grandmother, the words embedding themselves into her heart and mind. Her journey of faith has led her to study anabaptism, seeing Jesus not only as Savior and Lord, but teacher - the center of our faith. Like a potted house plant her journey turned inch by inch, little by little. Now that pot is turning half way around - no longer in the shadows, but basking in the sun.

Turning, following, on the journey.

Repentance, in Luke's gospel, is to have your mind rewired. Jesus invites us on the Way, the way, his way, of formation and transformation.

What does it mean to authentically follow Jesus in your life?

I want all of us to spend a few moments considering our scriptures for today alongside the readings we will speak together as the body of Christ - welcoming our newest members into the journey.

Listen to these words, perhaps noticing where they land in you, where they beckon you to follow.

BECKY begins playing "I have decided to follow Jesus"

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

PAUSE

VOICE 1: The church is the body of Christ, created by God, and sustained by the Spirit. The church embodies Jesus' way of life in the world, revealing God's reign through words and actions.

SILENCE

To another Jesus said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me....'

Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first... Jesus said to him, 'No one who...looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

PAUSE

VOICE 2: When we choose to become members of the church, we commit ourselves to Christ, to one another, and to God's mission of healing and hope.

SILENCE

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

PAUSE

VOICE 1: Do you commit yourself to Christ's ways and teachings?

SILENCE

brothers and sisters - you were called to freedom. Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

PAUSE

VOICE 2: *Do you commit yourself to this body of believers by giving and receiving counsel in the congregation?*

PAUSE

VOICE 1 or 3: *Are you ready to participate in the mission of the church?*

PAUSE

Follow me... the journey begins here, now. Follow.