

Sermon

January 14 and 15, 2006

John 1:43-51; 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Pastor Don McCullough

was traveling in Ghana

when he learned something interesting.

In the dominant language of the people of Ghana,

there is only one way to ask “What is your religion?”

Do you know what question they ask?

They ask:

“Whom do you serve?”

No matter what denomination you are,

the key question for them—

—and I think for us—

is “Whom do you serve?”

Today,

the title of the sermon is

“Here I Am,

Follow Me,

Come and See.”

Those are key phrases in our Bible readings

as we think about who we serve.

I’ve always liked the story of Samuel.

He’s lying down, waiting to fall asleep.

And he hear’s a voice crying: “Samuel, Samuel.”

And he runs to Eli and says:

“Here I am.”

And Eli says:

“I didn’t call you.

Go back to bed.”

And then it happened again.

“Samuel, Samuel.”

“Here I am.”

“I didn’t call you.

Go back to bed.”

And then a third time.

But the third time Eli figures out that it's God.

And he says to Samuel,

"Next time, when you hear God call, say,

'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

And God calls,

and Samuel says:

"Speak, Lord, for your **servant** is listening."

What a model for us.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

Do you ever lie awake at night—

—thinking

—wondering

—listening?

I do.

My best times to think are when I'm in the shower

and when I'm lying in bed.

Especially when everyone else is already asleep

and the house is quiet.

And sometimes the thoughts are fun and comforting.

And sometimes the thoughts are worrisome and frightening.

Perhaps,

regardless of what type of thought it is,

we would be wise to respond with Samuel:

"Here I am.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Because when God is Lord

and we are servant,

things fall into place.

The joyful thoughts find a place

in thanksgiving to God.

And the thoughts of fear and worry

find their place

knowing that God is in control.

And we are followers—  
—servants.

Whom do you serve?  
Where is your center?  
What are you willing to put your life on the line for?  
What are you willing to die for?

Jesus comes to you and to me and says:  
Follow me.  
That's what Jesus said to Philip.  
And that's what Jesus says to you and to me.  
He says: "Follow me."

The Greek word for follow is:  
akoloutheo  
(acolyte comes from this word).

Literally, akoloutheo means  
—to walk behind; or  
—to let another lead

Or in other words,  
to be a disciple,  
to be a follower,  
to be one who serves.

Jesus found Philip and said to him:  
"Follow me."

Jesus finds you and me and says to us:  
"Follow me."

I was looking back in my sermon notes.  
I preached on this text 9 years ago.  
And I was struck by what I wrote.

Here's what I wrote,  
as I focused on God being central in our lives:

I wrote:

I was sharing with a group of people here at church  
a couple weeks ago—  
—that the great commandment of Jesus  
struck me in a different way recently.

I don't know if this was a bedtime thought  
or a shower thought,  
but I thought—  
—You know,  
all we have to do to follow Jesus is to love.

That's it.  
That's all God expects of us.  
All God wants from us.  
All that it takes to make us happy.  
All that it takes to make us complete.

I think at the time I was feeling overwhelmed  
by all the things I had on my list—  
—all the things I had to do.  
And I was probably getting kind of surly  
because I was feeling the pressure.  
And I realized—  
—all I have to do is love.

That's all I have to do today.  
All I have to do tomorrow.  
Next week.  
Next month.  
Next year.  
All I have to do until I die.

And that was a really freeing thought.

Now,  
I didn't throw out my list,  
or even stop doing those things on my list.  
But when you have a sense of the bigger picture—  
—a knowledge of what's at the center—  
—it all looks different somehow.

As I think about that 9 years later,  
there is a part of me that says:  
“I thought it was freeing  
to know that all I have to do is love.  
That’s impossible.  
I can’t do it.

But there’s another part of me that feels the same way I did then.  
When you know what’s at the center,  
then the details don’t seem so overwhelming.

I know I’ll fail.  
I know I won’t love the way God calls me to love.  
I know I won’t follow the way Jesus calls me to follow.  
I know I turn away again and again and again.

But,  
I also know that God’s Spirit keeps drawing me back.  
I know that Christ goes to the cross  
because I can’t love the way I must.  
And on that cross,  
in the death of Jesus,  
in some amazing, mysterious way,  
there is life for you and for me.  
I know that God is always there for you and for me.  
And knowing that,  
I know that, however much I may fail at what I do,  
God is still at the center,  
and nothing can ever separate me from God’s love.

And knowing that God’s at the center,  
the details can fall into place.  
And I don’t need to worry.  
I don’t need to stay awake.  
When God calls me and says: Follow me.  
I can say with Samuel, “Here I am.  
Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

There's one more phrase from our lessons.

Here I Am.

Follow Me.

And finally...

**Come and See.**

After Jesus said "Follow Me" to Philip,

Philip went to find Nathanael.

And he said to him:

"We have found him about whom Moses  
in the law and also the prophets wrote,  
Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

And Nathanael,

maybe because he was prejudiced,

maybe because he was a cynic,

maybe because he was grumpy

said:

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

And Philip,

instead of arguing with him,

instead of trying to convince him,

instead of getting mad at him,

Philip simply said:

"Come and see."

And Nathanael came.

And Nathanael saw.

And Nathanael believed.

And Nathanael followed.

It was just a simple invitation.

When we follow Jesus,

one of the things that Jesus asks us to do

is to simply share the good news.

Our job is not to convince.  
Not to argue.  
Not to make someone else do something.  
It's just to share the good news.  
To invite.  
To say, "Come and see."

To witness  
is to invite someone to come and see  
the Jesus  
who has made a difference in your life.

So, Philip invited Nathanael  
to see Jesus where Philip had seen him.  
And where do we invite our friends and family and neighbors to see Jesus?  
Where we see him.

Where is it that you see Jesus?  
Is it here at church?  
Then invite others to come and see Jesus here at church.  
Is it in your Bible reading?  
Then share those thoughts and times with others.  
Is it in a walk on the woods?  
Then take a walk in the woods together,  
and as you're walking,  
share how God is present for you there.  
Is it as you care for the hungry and needy?  
Then invite someone else to share in that compassion and service.

Wherever you meet Jesus,  
wherever Christ comes to you,  
wherever you experience God's presence,  
invite someone else along.

And it doesn't matter if that someone else  
is a Christian or a non-Christian,  
    someone strong in their faith  
    or someone who has never heard the good news.  
Witness isn't a one-time thing.  
    Witness is something we do over and over and over again.  
        To those who have never heard the good news.  
        And to those who have heard it all their lives.  
And we need to hear that good news over and over and over again, too.

I hope you were here to hear Marilyn Sharpe last weekend.  
It was a very helpful time for me  
    and hopefully for you as well.  
She shared something with us at the lunch on Sunday noon.  
    In your bulletin,  
        you'll find a page that has the 4 Keys.  
This is a concept that the Youth and Family Institute,  
    where Marilyn is on staff,  
        put together.

And it's just a way of taking faith  
    beyond the walls of the church building.  
Of witnessing,  
    starting with those closest to you.

4 Keys.  
    Caring Conversation.  
        Which is essentially listening and sharing  
        with the love that God gives,  
            not necessarily even mentioning the source of that love.

Family Devotions. (Or, finding God in everyday life)  
    Which, as she puts it,  
        is turning up the God language under that caring conversation.  
        And that devotion can be formal and scheduled,  
            or it can be informal and spontaneous.

Family Rituals and Traditions.

Again, nothing fancy.

Just the way you do the things you do.

How do you say hello and goodbye?

How do you say good morning and good night?

How do you remember God

in the midst of the day?

And finally, Family Service.

Which means serving together,

with your spouse,

or good friends,

or your children,

or nieces and nephews,

or extended family.

So the joy of service is shared

and caught.

And following Jesus in service

becomes a way of life

as we share it together.

I encourage you to put the 4 Keys page on your refrigerator.

We'll be using those as a congregation in the coming weeks and months.

I encourage you to use them as well

to shape your faith in daily life.

So,

Here I Am.

Follow Me.

Come and See.

Christ is at the center.

May God's Spirit strengthen us to follow together.

In Jesus' name,

Amen