

Matthew 4:18-24

The Real News

The Christian faith begins along the shores of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approached two sets of brothers with a simple invitation. “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fishers of men.” For reasons that are not given, they dropped what they were doing and followed him. They had no idea what they were getting into, of course.

In the general scheme of things at the time, the Sea of Galilee was not the center and Peter and Andrew, James and John, were not prominent people, at least not beyond their lakeside community. This was, in historical terms, an obscure event about which most people were unaware, most assuredly the movers and shakers in the Roman world.

I mention this obscurity because of the tensions in our country and among us over the recent election. There are some who are elated, believing at last that our country has a chance of moving in the right direction. There are others who are deeply troubled that our country is moving in the wrong direction. These differences of opinion about things run deep and affect the way we view one another. I will not tell you what your convictions should be. I have been restrained about this election, as I think I should be, but I risk seeming out of touch with world events as if they are

not relevant to the Christian faith. I am concerned about this division. Wherever it is that we are going as a country, we will only get there together. The divisions between us are the real sickness and we seem to be getting sicker. Relationships are more important than being right. That is gospel truth. There are a few suggestions that I will make.

Paul and James

The first is to remember some things aptly expressed by Paul in Ephesians:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful to building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of Redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love . . .” The rule of love is the highest rule. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

And be reminded with James that human anger does not accomplish God's will, even if it is "righteous" anger.

And finally, remember that the real news (and I mention this with some trepidation because of recent "fake news" scandals) is not what is happening in Washington. The real news is in obscure lakeside towns where there are no reporters and where seemingly ordinary people have encounters and make decisions sometimes almost on a whim, and not only change their own lives, but the life of the world.

The real news happens when people experience the miracle of becoming friends against the trends of the day. It happens whenever the gospel encounter happens and one way or another someone hears, "follow me" and for some reason drops whatever they are doing to follow without really having much of an idea where it will all lead. The real news is what God is doing, unaffected by what is happening on the larger stage of history.

Enough of that. I do not ordinarily speak to these things, but sometimes it is necessary to address the larger society because the biblical message is relevant to it.

Helping

We can learn something about where following Jesus leads from the summaries in the gospels which characterized the movements and activities of Jesus when he was calling the first disciples and asking them to follow him.

Matthew tells us that it led them throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. We read that as the news about Jesus spread all over the region, people with all sorts of maladies were brought to him and he healed them. There is no sign here of the trouble that would come their way and that would change forever the way they viewed him and interpreted the meaning of his life.

What Peter and Andrew and James and John did see was pain. So the early part of what we call the public ministry of Jesus is defined by miraculous healing, at least miraculous to us. And if we are skeptical about our own abilities to work wonders like Jesus did, we can learn from his desire to help others.

I wonder if there was ever a time in human history when people were not conflicted by this desire to help, when they left unconsidered the notion that we are

healthiest when we serve others and most unhealthy when we are unduly selfish.

Whatever the case, Jesus was inclined to help others when he called his disciples the first few steps of the journey led to places where there were people in pain. Their mandate was to serve and help. In their experience they witnessed extraordinary things.

Preaching the Kingdom

Besides helping those in pain, the early ministry of Jesus was also characterized by the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom. Let us not be naive and think that the world into which Jesus and his disciples proclaimed the good news was a world that didn't have bad news in it, or at least not as bad as the news in our world. Their world was also filled with bad news and great evil.

And yet into that world the good news came just as it comes into our world. It is the wonderful news that the creative power of the universe is a person who is compassionate and kind; that mercy is part of the fabric out of which all things are made; it is the sometimes hard to take news that the trouble in the world is the fault of all the people everywhere because sin is universal and inescapable. Yet it is the news that nothing we have done or will do or can do is able to

separate us from God's love and the best most transforming things begin when we meet and become friends because that is a good way to describe what being fishers of men means.

First the meeting.

And then the miraculous healing begins.

And that is the real news.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)