

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 1:16-20; 1 John 2:3-6

Mark 1:16-20 The Message (MSG): 16-18 Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed. 1: 19-20 A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee’s sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

1 John 2:3-6 The Message (MSG): The Only Way to Know We’re in Him

2-3 Here’s how we can be sure that we know God in the right way: Keep his commandments. 4-6 If someone claims, “I know him well!” but doesn’t keep his commandments, he’s obviously a liar. His life doesn’t match his words. But the one who keeps God’s word is the person in whom we see God’s mature love. This is the only way to be sure we’re in God. Anyone who claims to be intimate with God ought to live the same kind of life Jesus lived.

A father and son went fishing one day. After a couple hours out in the boat, the boy suddenly became curious about the world around him. He asked his father, “How does this boat float?” The father thought for a moment, then replied, “Don’t rightly know, son.”

The boy returned to his contemplation, then turned back to his father, “How do fish breath underwater?” Once again, the father replied, “Don’t rightly know, son.”

A little later the boy asked his father, “Why is the sky blue?” Again, the father replied, “Don’t rightly know, son.”

Worried he was going to annoy his father, he said, “Dad, do you mind my asking you all these questions?” “Of course, not son. If you don’t ask questions, you’ll never learn anything!”

Asking questions is a good way to attain knowledge. When it comes to our faith and relationship with God, we want to gain knowledge of the scriptures to learn more about God, but is that enough? Is it enough to know about God? If we’ve read God’s Word, we know that the answer to that question is no. The scriptures teach us, like the text we heard from first John, that we need to know God—not just know about God—for our relationship and faith in him to make any difference in our lives. So, how do we work at knowing God?

I have a picture of one of my pastors from Lititz COB. It’s a picture of Jimmy Ross. Pastor Jimmy is very special to me. He helped me through a difficult period in my life. He was very instrumental in my becoming a pastor. I have a great deal of respect and love for him. Jimmy is and always will be a mentor to me. When I find myself experiencing a challenging moment in ministry, I often look at that picture and say to myself, “What would Jimmy do in this situation?”

Many of us have role models—people we look up to for inspiration and guidance, someone we aspire to be like. A good role model is someone who helps us to value ourselves and encourages us to be the best person we can be. Often times, these people help us see things in ourselves that we don’t recognize. Think about it—who has been a role model for you?

How about Jesus? Maybe you’ve heard of the acronym WWJD that reminds Christians to ask themselves in different situations: “What would Jesus do?” Do you strive to be like Jesus? The Bible tells us there is no better example to follow to show us how to love God and neighbor. We know Jesus as the Son of God, Immanuel, meaning “God With Us”—the incarnation of the divine presence with flesh and blood, a prophet, teacher, and our Savior.

We know these things about Jesus, but the disciples knew none of this when Jesus called them to follow him. Yet, they dropped everything to follow him. Why? Looking at some of the context when the calling of the disciples happened may help us to understand why.

You see, in the Jewish culture of Jesus day, six-year old children began attending classes at the local synagogue five days a week to learn the Torah—the first five books of the Bible. They actually memorized the whole first five books of the Bible, which I think is amazing. The classes were called “Bet Sefer.” At the age of ten, they graduated, and they were finished with their schooling. At that point, most children would begin learning the family trade like fishing or carpentry.

But the kids who stood out—those who were on the honor roll—were permitted to continue their schooling. They attended “Bet Talmud.” Those who attended this class studied all of the Hebrew scriptures, which is our Old Testament. These ten- through fourteen-year-olds memorized the whole Old Testament. They also learned the Jewish art of questions and answers. This means they learned how to answer questions with questions, which is something Jesus did often. In this way, the students demonstrated both their knowledge and their great respect for the scriptures. They were taught to always be curious about the scriptures.

Not many young children made it this far, but if you did and you knew your scriptures well enough—making the distinguished honor roll—there was a possible opportunity for you to attend yet another set of classes called “Bet Midrash.” If you made it to these classes, you were given the honor of studying under a rabbi.

But even if you succeeded in making it to the distinguished honor roll, this third level of education was not an automatic advancement. You had to go through a difficult grilling of questions performed by the rabbi before being accepted into this level of education. The rabbi did this not only to determine if the you knew enough, but more importantly, he wanted to determine if you could be like him in all areas of your life. If the rabbi didn’t think you could succeed at this, you were sent back to your family to learn the family trade.

Very few students made it this far, but if you did, the rabbi would become your teacher; and your goal would be to believe what he believed, to interpret the scriptures as he interpreted them, and to become like him in every way. If you passed the rabbi’s interrogation of questions, he would say to you “Come follow me.” Being chosen for this was considered a great honor.

Now, the disciples never made it to the distinguished honor roll. They were sent home to learn the family trade. As fishermen, they were not very high on the social ladder.

But then, Jesus, who was considered a great teacher...—and even a rabbi by many in his day—came along and said, “Come follow me” to these uneducated, simple men. In other words, Jesus said to them, come and learn from me, come and learn to be like me in every way, come and follow my example. This was big stuff! When you think about what this meant to the people in that day, who wouldn’t drop everything for this opportunity to follow Jesus, especially, if you were never assessed to be worthy of following a rabbi.

Interestingly, although it did take some time, the disciples did become like Jesus. Day in and day out, they followed his teachings of obedience to God, They asked a lot of questions. Repeatedly, they did what he did and messed up sometimes which must have frustrated Jesus terribly, but they experienced his grace and love for them. All of this changed who they were, not only on the outside, but it also changed who they were on the inside.

Here’s the good news, my friends. Jesus, the Son of God, the great Rabbi, calls to us and says, “Come follow me.” It’s an invitation like no other invitation we will ever receive. He says to us—come and follow my example, learn from me, do as I do, come and get to know me

intimately. Live with me day in and day out, not just on Sunday mornings or when it is convenient for you. And if you do, your eyes will be opened, your heart will be unlocked to my presence living in you, and you will be like me—maybe not perfect—but don't worry, I will take care of that. And when you become like me, listen to this—**you pass on my example to those around you.**

The story is told of a T.V. repairman who didn't like to think about his job when he came home. As a result, he never bothered to properly install the T.V. antenna on the top of his house or fix it when one arm broke in a windstorm. One day, a new family moved in next door, and the owner went up on his roof to install an antenna. Knowing that his neighbor was a T.V. repairman, he put his up exactly the same way and tuned his antenna to face in the same direction as his neighbor's. Then after studying his neighbor's antenna for a while, he reached up and broke one arm off his new antenna! As disciples, we teach by example, whether we intend to or not.

Having a servant's heart, becoming selfless, obeying God's commands, loving one's neighbor becomes who we are when we follow the example of Christ because that is who he was and is. We have the privilege with his presence in us to be his example to those around us.

But we do have competition. There are other examples—an evil presence—vying for the attention of people. Selfishness, wealth and power entice people to follow a path that separates them from God. Everyone has a choice about who will be his or her role models in life.

Carrying on the example of Jesus is an individual responsibility, but it is also our responsibility as a congregation. I'm afraid too many of our churches today may be fading away as places known where Jesus can be found. The world sees us fighting with one another. They experience us as judgmental because of our discomfort with what is different and unknown. They see us living our lives like everyone else in the world and wonder, what does it matter if we have Jesus in our lives.

I don't believe that's what we want our neighbors to experience from us. I don't believe we come to church on Sunday so that we can leave here only to be like the unchurched world. We want something more. We want to be something more. We have a heart to make our lives, our neighborhoods, our nation—even our world—a better place. Isn't that what we want?

Jesus is ready to lead the way. Jesus is our example—our great Rabbi, the one who believes us to be distinguished honor roll students, and the one who we are called to follow. He is the one who will live in and through us. This is who we are called to be for each other and for our community. Let nothing stop us from dropping everything to follow Jesus. Amen.