

“A Discipleship Oriented Church”

Matthew 4:18-22, Acts 2:42-47

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The last three weeks, we have been rethinking the role of the church: Community, Mission Oriented and Inclusive People gathering in the name of Christ Jesus. This morning, I am going to talk about a Discipleship oriented church. We still tend to think church is Sunday worship. Like a theater, people come and watch a movie and go home. Clearly, church is a discipleship movement of transformation for ourselves, community and for our world. Our spirit is inspired by Jesus' teachings and mission. Jesus wouldn't have disciples carry on his ministry, if church continued to be “an exclusive membership club”. The purpose of Jesus' ministry was to spread good news that God loves everyone. So no matter who you are, if you believe in Jesus, you are accepted and become a child of God. Jesus came to earth for this ministry and died scarifying his life to expand the love of God, especially for those who were the marginalized, outcast, women, low income class people and any individuals who were treated as “a second class citizen and gentiles”. Jesus broke the wall among us.

Church is people gathering who are called to continue to carry on Jesus' teaching and his passion. If church wants to remain as a Sunday worship gathering only, that church is not a vibrant thriving congregation. If church won't take any risk for their mission, that is not an open minded and outreach oriented congregation. If church is not interested in investing in young and old people's education, like Bible Study and Sunday School, there is no future for that church. As church, we need to be aware of ourselves whether we are being a good church or losing our identity as a disciple of Christ. Our Methodism founder, John Wesley, reminded his church people, saying “There must be three things in church: Are there any new members, is there fire, and is there any new fruit?” What do you think about our church? When I look at our church mission statement, there are three important values: Love, Grow and Serve. We are fueled by the love of Jesus Christ, and eager to grow and never stop continuing to reach out. In a sense, we are “Bringers”. We go and share God's good news and bring the unchurched to do God's ministry. That is what church is all about.

The United Methodist Church's mission statement is "to make disciples of Christ Jesus for transformation of the world." I want to ask you to think about the meaning of "discipleship" first. What is "discipleship"? Disciples are followers of Jesus Christ. As we know, there were twelve disciples who sought out more people to follow Jesus and joined his new understanding of the Kingdom of God. If disciples are people willing to follow and join Jesus' new movement, I would say that discipleship means acting on this ministry and spirit. We can think of the word, Church denoting action. I want to challenge us to transform our understanding of what the church ought to be-not static (not come and go place) but active (beyond the building). Let's revisit our Scripture readings and find out more meaning of discipleship.

Our first reading describes how Jesus called two brothers, Peter and Andrew as his followers. They were casting their net into the sea-because they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And then Jesus continued to call James and John in the same way. They were fishermen, too. These four fishermen were called to follow Jesus and they became the first four disciples. What attracted these men and changed their life direction? When we talk about discipleship, where can we find any clue in this story? I am very fascinated by the image and metaphor of fishing when Jesus invited these four men to join him. Obviously, it was the easiest parable to tell, "Okay, I will make you fish for people." By the way, what does this mean to "fish for people"? Let's consider "fishing for people" or "discipleship" using a fishing rod. When you go fishing and want to catch fish, either use of a net or fishing pole, the key words are "hooked" and "caught", in other words, "life changing experience" and the process of "transformation". For another example, think about when you were married, and when you have a child, was that a life changing experience? You were hooked or caught. Or you were "stuck"!

Jesus wanted to have his disciples bring people in and help them experience God's transforming love. When we read and study the Bible, our main purpose is not for information but transformation. Jesus clearly said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God, unless they are born again." Here "born again" means "spiritual rebirth" and it is about "the transformational experience." Our second Scripture reading also describes early church community life and faith. Early Christians devoted themselves to spiritual practice, fellowship and nurturing. Our Christian faith and life requires us to continue to renew ourselves and church, not only transforming ourselves but also our world.

We are called to transform our world. If this vision is too big, then let us start with ourselves first. Are we transforming ourselves from an old being to a

new being, which means are we continuing to “be born again” for the spiritual rebirth in Christ Jesus? Spiritually, we should renew our spirit every moment to be like Jesus. Then we need to ask our church this same question, “Does our Fair Oaks church make any changes for our community and do anything for transformation of the world? One of our church members suggested to me whether we could contact Red Cross and open our church space for blood drives for our local community. I thought that this is an innovative local mission and outreach ministry for transformation and a way of transforming the world through a small act. If church stops transforming and we stop changing ourselves, our church is not the church that Jesus wanted us to be. Let’s continue to move, work and serve to be the disciples of Christ. Amen.