

SERMON TITLE- " . . . Committed Followers . . ."

TEXT- Luke 5:27-32

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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The Neighbourhood Church Mission-

“To Build Committed Followers Of Jesus- To Do His Work In Our City, Country and World.”

We are in a series of sermons looking at our mission statement. So far we have learned several things-

1. We are a “missional people.”
2. We told “To Build.”

Last week Ryan took up the challenge of preaching on our imperative [or command] “To Build . . .” When we undertook this series, Ryan had a challenge on his hands- how do you preach a Biblical sermon when you are told before you preach, what the punch line is? So he looked at some of my old sermons on this topic and concluded that I used to be a “builder.” He also concluded that he comes from a different background and thus would have a different perspective. It was very good.

Understanding that we come from different places in the presentation of the Good News is very important. The Good News is not just about people living in an agrarian culture 2000 years ago. It is not about people living in Nanaimo, today. It is not about being teachers, or truck drivers or farmers or construction workers.

The Good News of the KoG is for all people in all cultures in all times. This means that each person will see some special insight but each individual insight is also limited.

The command “To Build” needs to be understood from all kinds of angles- but it is a command. We are a building people.

But this naturally leads to the next question- “so what are we supposed to be building?”

As a “builder” I love to build just for the sake of building. Years ago I built a log cabin. When I go to the beach I build sand castles. I love building at the church and would build houses just for the pure fun of doing it.

But that is definitely not how the KoG works. We are builders- but we have a specific building assignment.

So- what are we supposed to build?

The answer to that question is woven into the ministry and teachings of Jesus and the NT. We could start almost anywhere to answer that question but starting at the beginning of Jesus ministry makes a lot of sense to me.

When Jesus began His ministry He first began by going up to people and giving them a “call.”

The pattern was very simple-

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At

once they left their nets and followed him. Matthew 4:18-20

And there you have it- Jesus' call goes out to everyone with ears to hear- "Follow Me!"

Follow Me

This may have been Jesus' most famous call- but today, to flesh that out a little we are going to look at a slightly less famous call-

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Luke 5:27-28

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Luke 5:29-30

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:31-32

I chose a slightly expanded version of the call because it fills out the mission beautifully.

The call goes out to the entire world.

The call goes out to those who need it. There is a note of irony in Jesus' response to the teachers of the law. Of course they too are sinners- the problem is that they don't see themselves as such. That is a fatal mistake. There is medicine for the disease of sin- but if you don't take the medicine it does you no good.

Those who have received the call and become citizens of the KoG introduce that gift to those they know. Levi does what he knows how- he invites his friends to come see Jesus. That is a great side note about what a natural response looks like- a response that we can naturally learn from.

But the bottom line, for today is Jesus call to Levi- "follow Me."

And that is both the simplest and most complete description of what we are supposed to build if we obey Jesus commands.

We Are Supposed To Build Followers Of Jesus

Following Jesus is what the KoG is all about. It was the call Jesus issued and it is the call that has gone out for 2000 years.

Now like many challenges of this nature it goes 2 ways- we are supposed to build ourselves as followers of Jesus- even as we take up the challenge of helping others to grow in this regard.

So a message like this is like a two edged sword- even as it is directed outward it is directed inward- and even as it is directed inward it is directed outward.

And this leads to the next question-

What does following Jesus mean?

Consistently the answer was the same- to follow Jesus meant that the follower was required to leave what they were doing to start the journey.

When I started working on this sermon I had actually started with a different text, one in which a series of answers to the "what does it mean to follow Jesus?" questions were asked and responded to. It begins with Jesus challenge-

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23

This leads to a series of responses-

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Luke 9:57-58

He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Luke 9:59-60

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:61-62

All of this boils down to one thing- following Jesus is not like going on a trek, where we can bail out if things start to get uncomfortable. No- following Jesus is a big, challenging, life altering decision. It means being prepared to step away from life as we have come to know it- into a whole new existence- without really knowing what the details of that journey are.

It is a scary decision and those who take it glibly probably don't understand the call.

But since we are responding to the question- "what are we supposed to be building?" we are going to move away from that scary aspect and focus on how we do this.

Some years ago we did a Bungy challenge and I was one of a couple of people who took that Bungy plunge. It is scary to be standing up on top of that bridge and look down and think about stepping off.

In some ways the decision to answer Jesus' call, "Follow Me" is a little like stepping off that bridge. In that case a battle takes place in the mind that needs to be overcome.

Once that battle is overcome however there are some very practical details that need to take place. You need to listen to the people working there and go through a series of steps.

Today we are going to look at 2 aspects of actually obeying that command. We are going to assume that the fear has been dealt with and the only question is- how does it happen?

In very simple terms this challenge has 2 parts- First- taking the first step on that journey. A significant part of the Kingdom challenge is telling people about that journey and then inviting them to take that first step. It is the step of actually stepping off of the bridge. It is the step of following up on the decision that the mind has made. To do that your feet have to do their part.

There are people who think that the whole battle is in their minds. It is not. The fantasy world of games is full of people who can perform amazing exploits in a virtual world. It can be an exciting world- but only foolish people would equate virtual heroism with real life heroism.

There are churches that focus on that step and spend their efforts on challenging people to take the first step. This is a vital part of the Kingdom mandate and one that is particularly exciting. It is no wonder that the Gospels spend quite a bit of time on the

stories of that first step.

The stories of Peter, James, John, Paul and others who began their journeys following Jesus make up the NTR narrative. It is exciting.

However it is only one of 2 vital parts-
Second- there is the matter of keeping on with the journey.

As a Church our mission is to “build . . . followers.” Even as we wrote this we knew that we wanted to make sure it was understood that the rest of the journey is just as vital as the first step. And so we added the word “committed.”

This week as I thought about that word I did what is so easy with computers- I typed “committed” into a Bible word search and came up with a whole series of verses that talked about sins that were being “committed.”

Obviously this is a very different meaning than the one we were trying to convey. So what Biblical word does convey our intention? The word that probably came closest is “perseverance.”

This is a quality that marks out the Kingdom ideal.

In fact Jesus told several parables about this quality, the most well known being the parable of the Sower and the Seed.

Because we are covering a lot of ground today I will only read the explanation of the parable-

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Luke 8:11-12

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. Luke 8: 13-14

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. Luke 8:15

And there is it- the seed that is planted in good soil “**by persevering**” produces a crop.

And the point of the parable is- the purpose of planting seed is not to scatter seed as far and wide as possible.

The purpose is not to see a whole field of green shoots spring from the ground.

The purpose is not to see a great mass of vegetation rise from the earth.

No, the purpose of the whole effort is to see a harvestable crop grow to maturity.

Our building assignment is to build followers of Jesus who will grow into maturity and produce a Kingdom crop.

This is a whole other challenge. Our assignment is to produce solid characters.

Of course a sermon that tells us how to do that would be taking on a big challenge and since this is only part of the sermon let me give a summary.

First, we have been given a great description of what a persevering follower looks like-

i. noble and good heart. These days Sebastian and I are going through a RL Stevenson novel called, The Black Arrow. It is a romantic tale from the 15th century and the time in

England called, The War of the Roses. It is a story of knights doing battle during the age of chivalry.

And what was supposed to distinguish a knight? A knight was supposed to have a noble and true heart. The heroic knights from the age of chivalry were supposed to be people who rescued the less fortunate.

The myth of the knight was that he had a deep character trait that shone from him.

The reality was, even in the romantic novels, that real knights were just bullies with stronger horses and better armor and more money than the rest of society.

However the ideal of the good and noble heart is a Kingdom challenge. As followers of Jesus we are to put before ourselves the challenge to live at a character standard that rises above the crowd. We after all are servants and followers of the Creator of the King of Kings.

And how do we do this? The legendary knights of old not only deep characters that carried them when no one was looking- they also challenged each other to raise their standards.

Being a follower of Jesus is a team game and wherever we go we carry the name of our team with us.

We are told to be conscious of this fact. There is no where that we go that our team colours aren't seen.

Our noble and good hearts are to be the marks of our characters. This is the inward and outward challenge.

But there is another piece-

ii. who hear the word, retain it

We are to be people who listen. What does that mean? On Sat morning I heard Michael Campbell taking about the stock market, as he does every week. This time he said something that was truly wise. "Make sure that you are actually are watching and learning. History does have patterns- but once you identify them they change. Those who don't actually watch what is happening with fresh eyes will get burned."

That is a Kingdom principle. Kingdom people need to have ears to hear, to learn and then retain that learning.

To build committed followers we need to both be and teach each other to hear and retain God's Word.

And then there is-

iii. and by persevering produce a crop

There's the Biblical word that we were trying to capture by "committed" the work perseverance.

Committed followers are those who persevere.

So how do we build this? We teach perseverance.

At the end of the day- being a "committed" follower means that we learn to hang on when things are tough.

And this, at the end of the day