

The 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany – 01.21.2024

How you stepped outside of your comfort zone lately? Our lives can become so much in a rut, and we stay there, because it is comfortable. Each of our jobs or activities can become predictable. If we have been doing it long enough, we often know what to expect.

We are studying the Old Testament in confirmation right now. It seems history continues to repeat itself. From the beginning human beings have had a choice, listen to God or tell God that we know better. Are we willing to trust God or do we let our anxiety listen to people who want to keep others under control?

We continue to have many voices to listen to today and some are louder than others. It continues to be apparent that some people are following voices that don't make sense to us. As Christians answering Jesus' call to follow him, we are called to listen with keener and keener ears. The messages that we hear in our culture are going to become more confusing and not truthful.

This is where I challenge you and I to stop and listen to the message and to see if they line up with what Jesus' teachings are as we understand them. If the message does not affirm all of God's creation, then it is most likely not a message to follow. All Christians will not agree, and this is the tough part.

There are Christians who read and understand the Bible differently than we do. Thus, we are called to continue to study God's Word. We do have a Bible study every week online and the Holy Spirit is alive and active in it, challenging us in our faith journey.

Our study is during the day; thus, it cuts out people who work during the day. I wonder if when we are not studying the Bible in some way that when we are challenged by other Christians who study the Bible, how will we be able to answer? Everyone is busy and I understand that. There is only so much time and energy that we human beings have.

When the disciples were called to follow Jesus in our Gospel for today, what were they leaving? What were they risking? They were working with their father which meant their business supported families. Their business was tied into the commerce of their area. Not only did their families depend on them, but the whole area relied on their work.

In a sense they were tied into the government which meant their father and others would have to carry on the business without them. The fisherman were leaving a big hole, and their family was probably wondering how they could leave

them and their work. The pull to Jesus seemed to be stronger. They heard and felt something that allowed them to take the risk and follow Jesus.

Mark even says that they immediately left. Unless it was an emergency, can you think of anyone or anything that would cause you to answer a call immediately? As Christians, we can look at this and say, God through the Holy Spirit had to have been at work.

In Mark, all that Jesus had said up until this point was “Time’s up, God’s kingdom is here, change your life, and believe in the good news.” Now this is something that they were waiting for. Immediately doesn’t involve much thought. That’s it, times up, here we go.

The fishermen were in a rut. They probably fished almost every day and had family responsibilities. As comfortable as they must have been in knowing what came next for the most part, they stepped right out of it to follow Jesus.

Most of us have called someone or made a request of someone and we often wait for a response. The length of time may depend on whether it is something that they want to do or don’t want to do. It may depend on how busy they are and if they want to change their schedule, let alone change their lives.

I would dare say there are not many requests made of us in life that we would immediately say yes and get up and follow. Especially ones that would upend everything that we have known. Leaving a job that gave some sense of security and family is not something we are often willing to do and the older we get the less we are willing to take that risk.

Jesus was asking these fishermen to step outside of their comfort zones and take a huge risk to follow him. Jesus needed people who were willing to learn in order to teach others. Jesus knew that they would be in for the ride of their lives. Even though it seems that they were following blindly, they sensed that Jesus was hopefully the Messiah who was proclaiming that God’s kingdom is here and that the good news needed to be shared with all people.

Here at Faith Lutheran Church, we have heard the good news in many different forms here in worship. We have it in print. We sing the good news, read it and proclaim it. We do it in deed or action outside of these doors too. But how are we telling or proclaiming the good news outside these doors in words?

God is not calling everyone here to leave your families and your jobs in order to proclaim the good news to all people. I do believe that God in Jesus Christ is calling us to assess how we are doing it, how we are telling others of the good news outside of these doors. As individuals, I have no doubts that we are doing this, but I am talking about in the name of Faith Lutheran Church.

During this time of transition, this is what we are being called to do, to answer the questions: 1) Who are we? 2) Who is our neighbor? 3) How is God calling us to share the good news inside and outside of these doors?

We have our first conversation with the congregation on March 3 where we will be working on answering the question who are we? I am working on getting information for us to answer the question, who is our neighbor? The transition team is working on a creative way in which to answer the question, how is God calling us to share the good news inside and outside of these doors?

When we seek God for the answers to these questions, I believe God will answer them. Most likely, God will be asking us to step out of our comfort zones, some of the ruts that we are in. Jesus calls us every day to share the good news with all people through word and deed.

Jesus is calling each one of us today as individuals and as a community of faith to share the good news. There are many voices in our culture today that share words more of judgement and a lack of inclusion. These are the voices that we are called to counter act with God's love.

As human beings with a spotty track record with God, we will be tempted to stay in our comfort zones, in our comfortable ruts. Thankfully Jesus continues to call us and promise us that we are not alone in sharing the good news. God sent the Holy Spirit to give us direction in our individual lives and the life of Faith Lutheran Church.

Our country is in a very tenuous place right now. Part of this call will be to listen for the truth. When we answer this call we are saying to God in Jesus Christ that we are going to listen for his truth. The kingdom is here, but we may need to work harder to find it and hear it. We will probably be called to uncomfortable places to share the good news as we hear it.

Some days we may answer the call immediately other days we may not, but the good news for us is that God continues to love us and forgive us. Jesus says to us today, "follow me and I will make you fish for people" How will you be answering that call and sharing the good news?