

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday, we heard one account of the calling of the first disciples. Today, we hear a second version of the same event. Last week, it was the message, “Come and see.” Today, we hear “Follow me.” Both messages are important.

Note that Jesus sets his base for ministry in Capernaum, a small fishing village on the northwestern shore of Galilee. He could have based his ministry in Nazareth, his home town, or Jerusalem, where all of the action was. Instead, he chose a small town—about a thousand people lived in Capernaum—to be his base of operations. That’s a community about fourteen times *smaller* than Beltsville. He lived and worked among the marginalized in society. His neighbors were the poor, the working class, rural men and women. The rich, powerful, and educated weren’t in Capernaum. Jesus did his ministry with those who most needed to hear the message—those on the margins.

As I prepared this week’s sermon, I came across a piece about “stuck” congregations by Bill Easum, a noted speaker on church development issues. Bill defines “stuck” congregations as ones which are stagnate or declining, and in which the central question is, “Who’s in control?” Bill goes on to define the groups which are found in such congregations.

First are the “Deciders.” These are the folks who are in control and, as the name implies, decide what is going to happen in the church. The Deciders go looking for the “Doers” to do what the Deciders have thought up. The largest group are the “Ignored,” whom the Deciders either don’t see as part of the church or have asked to do something once, were told “No,” or more likely, “Not right now,” and from that point on were ignored or overlooked by the Deciders.

It doesn’t take long, but soon the Deciders have put so much on the Doers that there are no more Doers willing to tend to the maintenance of the church. That’s when the fireworks begin.

The Doers become the “Dreamers,” saying “no” to repeated requests by the Deciders to do things or come to meetings where the focus is the survival of the institutional church structure. The Dreamers think about what the church *can be* and *not* how to

keep the institution alive and the Deciders in control. Because there is chaos in the institution, Easum says, the Deciders become even more controlling, thwarting the actions of the Dreamers. Eventually, the Dreamers leave and the institution begins to quickly die.

Easum isn't here to defend his position, and it's not my intent to do it for him. Yes, his model is generally sound, but as much as some might want to say that this describes Abiding Presence, I suggest that we don't fit so cleanly into his model.

Look around you. Think of those who are not here right now because of the weather. Think back to four years ago when we gathered together here for the first time. We had a bunch of Deciders, a handful of Doers, and a lot of Ignored. There were also a few Dreamers in our midst—your pastor being one of them. Abiding Presence had so much potential built up, and it only needed someone to step into the engine, release the brakes, and move the whole train down the tracks.

Well, we've done that, and sometimes, the train was moving way too fast. It rocketed down the way, picking up speed as we restructured the church to support ministry, not committees. A Korean ministry, complete with an extra pastor on staff, nearly derailed the train. But interestingly, more Dreamers started appearing in our midst. Some of the Dreamers had been among the ranks of the Ignored. The Deciders, however, didn't like the chaos, and became Controllers.

The problem was, the Controllers tried to control what was happening in the church by attempting to control the money. Many of them said publicly or privately, "If we can control the amount of money we have, we can force out the pastor. We were fine before he came. Heck, we really don't need a pastor, do we?"

Problem was, even as the Controllers tried to control the money, the Dreamers and Doers kept dreaming and doing. The Dreamers and Doers saw a glimpse of what the Holy Spirit could do with the people gathered at Abiding Presence, and in that glimpse, began to see a church that was involved in what was important—living out the Gospel's call to serve, make disciples, and spread the Good News to others.

The Controllers, having lost control, did what Dreamers most often do. The Controllers departed, seeking other places where they could be the Deciders once again, coming up with ways for the institution known as “the church” to depend on their decisions.

We still have Doers and Dreamers here. And some of these folks have taken part of the role as Deciders, too, but remain as Doers, knowing that there is much to be done in the fields and the laborers are too few. The number of those in the Ignored ranks continues to shrink, as the Doers and Dreamers have reached out to the Ignored, the marginalized in our midst, and invited them to take part in the ministry of the church.

The Doers and Dreamers have modeled for the Ignored inside and outside the church a godly life. They have shown by their actions what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In their very own actions, the Doers and Dreamers have let their light shine in the darkness, illuminating the world with the love of Christ which they received first in their baptism and now share and divide among others, just as the light from a single candle is used to light another, and another, and another while still burning bright. In time, the light dispels the darkness completely, and all bask in the brilliant light of Christ.

Jesus didn't call the disciples to be Deciders or to be the Ignored. In fact, he called them because they were part of the Ignored in their own society. Jesus called the disciples to follow him and be taught how to be Doers. Jesus promised he would teach them how to fish for people. The disciples would use their fishing skills not to cast woven nets into the water to drag fish onto their boats, but to cast the wide net of the Gospel to drag men, women, and children of all sizes, shapes and forms into the boat of salvation which comes to all through Jesus Christ.

Each of you is called in the same way to follow Jesus and learn how to cast a wide net into the world. Maybe we should set up a roadblock on Montgomery Road each Sunday morning and force cars into our parking lot, or go door-to-door as we come to church, filling our cars with folks and bringing them on board, just as the disciples dragged all kinds of fish on board in their nets. After all, isn't the message Jesus is sending us today cast a wide net? Fishermen catch all sorts of things in their nets when casting them in the ocean or sea. They expect that to happen—even today.

We should be casting a wide net. The truth is, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will catch everyone, ready or not. The net those who are fishers of people cast is filled with “keepers.” Nothing in the net of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is too small, too old, too anything not to be kept.

God sent his only Son to die for us because God so loved the world that he wanted everyone to live life and live it abundantly. Jesus died on the cross so that no one would ever have to fear being “tossed back” from the net that is the salvation which comes to us through Jesus.

Come, then, and leave your boats and follow Jesus, who calls and empowers you to be fishers of people. Put aside your rod and reel that will catch only one at a time, and take up Christ’s net, throw it widely, and catch the great catch of the Ignored, the Forgotten, the Marginalized, the Unchurched.

Jesus loves us enough to say, “Follow me.” Can we ignore someone who loves us?