

Wesley United Methodist Church  
January 24, 2021  
Learning What Jesus Values  
Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

If you watched the Inauguration on Wednesday, you saw a pageant of teamwork. Listening to the commentators explain what was going on made it even more obvious. There were security people lined up along walkways. There was someone greeting each person coming onto the platform and their escorts to tell them exactly where they would be sitting. The United States Marine Corp band was a masterful display of teamwork as they worked together to produce wonderful music. A little more out of our sight were the camera people coordinating what we were seeing.

The logistics of bringing this event to fruition and having it happen in what seemed to be seamless efficiency are well beyond anything that I can even begin to imagine. It was an example of multiple teams working as part of a much larger team producing an amazing event.

While this was not a religious event, teamwork is one of the things that Jesus values and one to which he calls us. In the first chapter of Mark's gospel, we hear how Jesus began his public ministry by preaching the Good News that God's kingdom had come near. Mark doesn't waste words which in his telling makes things move along faster. But just in case we miss that, he also likes to use the word immediately.

So, Mark tells us quickly about Jesus teaching and then tells us that as Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting nets and called them to come and follow him. As Mark notes, they did so immediately. A little farther along he came upon another pair of brothers, James and John and issued the same call to them. Immediately, they too left their nets to follow Jesus.

After about 30 years of pastoring and preaching, I've preached on this passage many times and usually I talk about how Jesus called them and calls us. I usually talk about how they stepped out in faith without knowing much of anything about Jesus and without having a nice business lunch to discuss what they were getting into and what

they could expect. And that Jesus also calls us to step out in faith. And all of that is true.

But there's another part that I seem to have missed most times. I have tended to think about this in terms of Jesus call to us as individuals, but today, I want to focus on something a little different. Not only does his call come to us as individuals, but he doesn't call us to come and be Lone Rangers. Jesus called Simon and Andrew, James and John and all of us to come and be part of a team.

Jesus called a team to travel with him; not because he was a rock star or a celebrity who needed a bunch of groupies following after him, but because his work would involve changing the world and that is work that needs to be done by many – not just by one.

Jesus called ordinary people for a particular purpose. He called them to fish not for bass and perch and trout or whatever kind of fish were caught in the Sea of Galilee, but rather to fish for people. He called them not to take on one more job, another task to add to their busy lives, but rather to change their identity and to become fishers for people.

On a fishing boat, each person works together with the others as part of a team so that they can accomplish their goal of catching a boatload of fish. Now they would put their experience of team work to good use by being part of Jesus' team. Now they would trust him to lead them where they were to go. Now they would trust him to set the agenda.

Still, they would be individuals. They each brought their own personalities, their individual skills, their sense of humor, their work ethic, their likes and their dislikes. From time to time they would try to convince Jesus to do things their way and would need to be reminded that in this case, he alone knew what needed to be done. From time to time, he would need to remind them of their call. This wasn't a onetime decision for them.

Although Mark tells us that they made the decision immediately, this was not the end of the story. It was only the beginning. They had a lot to learn just as we do. They

would stumble and misunderstand, just as we do. There would be times when they were tired and times when they were excited. Being a faithful follower of Jesus', being a Christian disciple takes both a moment to make a decision, and also a lifetime to grow into it. Christianity is for this moment right now, as well as for tomorrow, and next week, and next month and next year and everyday for the rest of our lives.

And we don't ever do this alone. We always have Jesus beside us. We have the Holy Spirit guiding us. But we also have each other. We are part of a team, part of something much bigger than ourselves; bigger than our own plans and our own lives, we are part of an all-inclusive team to help change our world, to make our world a place that truly lives and embodies what God values, what Jesus values.

We can see this teamwork in many ways and frequently we are not aware of the many parts of the team, the parts played by others who we do not see. I'm grateful for the team of people who worked to put together worship over the past two weeks while I was on vacation. You saw a few more faces than you normally see as some others took responsibility for some of the parts of the worship service that I normally do. But behind the scenes there were also people planning the worship, asking people to take part by reading and recording a piece of the service.

Even when I am here, like this week, there are many others involved in the important work of helping all of us worship. Liturgy really means the work of the people, and that has been especially true during this pandemic. There are people who record from their homes and someone who asks them to do this. There are people who come to church to play the organ or piano or to sing and then there is always someone you don't see sitting in the back of the sanctuary recording what they are doing. When I am here, I usually record by myself on my laptop.

But always all these individual recordings get uploaded to a file. Someone checks to make sure that everything has been recorded. Someone else takes them and puts them all together following an order and directions provided by someone else. A couple of us meet to review what has been put together and make sure that everything is in the right order. Someone prepares any graphics you see, the PowerPoint with the words of the prayers, an order of worship that gets emailed or snail mailed out to

people. Someone uploads the finished recording to You Tube and links to our Face Book page and our website.

That's a lot of teamwork simply to produce a worship service and most of it happens smoothly because the people on the team are willing to be part of a team, not needing attention called to themselves, but simply doing what they understand God calling them to do together in this one little piece of God's greater world and plan.

I could point out the teamwork of many many other parts of us being a church together, but I hope you get the idea. In the coming months as I prepare to retire, and you prepare to receive a new pastor, and you all prepare to learn how to be a team together there will be many opportunities to work together and to use the various gifts that God has given to you.

But it goes far beyond our local church. The Pandemic has made us more aware of the many ways in which we and others are important parts of teams. Teams that teach our children in person or remotely – teams that involve not only teachers doing amazing work, but parents, grandparents and others taking a much more active part in education than under more “normal” times. Internet and technology providers. Healthcare providers. Truck drivers. Grocery store clerks, shelf stackers. Cleaning crews. Scientists. No matter what our particular talents or abilities, we have discovered that we are all an important part of many teams learning new ways of working together and living out our Christian lives as part of these teams.

On Thursday morning, the day after the peaceful transfer of power in our government, I read a devotional written some time earlier. Steven Charleston served as an Episcopal Bishop in Alaska, as a professor, an advocate for social justice and is a member of the Choctaw nation. On Thursday morning I read these words in one of his books, “You and I have a contract with the Spirit. We have a working relationship. Our purpose in creation is not just to sit and look pretty, but to stand and go to work. Life is unfinished. Hope is not yet realized. There is much to be done, and much of it can only be done by you and I.”<sup>i</sup>

As I read those words, I thought about the teamwork to which Jesus calls each of us. Teamwork that involves being light for the world, being change agents for our world, being agents of peace where peace is absent, bringing healing where there is brokenness.

As I thought about this, I also heard God speaking to me through the words of Amanda Gorman whose words on Wednesday will probably be remembered and talked about more than the words of anyone else that day. In her poem, “The Hill We Climb” she said many things and I want to highlight just a few of them as I think about us being part of Jesus’ team. “... We lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us ... But one thing is certain, if we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy, and change our children’s birthright.... For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.”<sup>ii</sup>

There is an old story told of when Jesus returned to heaven after his death, resurrection and ascension. The angels gathered around and asked him questions about his work on earth. They wanted to know who would continue his work now that he was back in heaven. Jesus said, “Well, while I was on earth, I gathered a group of people around me who believed in me and who loved me. They will continue to carry on my work and share the Gospel.” The angel Gabriel asked, “You mean Peter who denied you three times, and the others who ran away when you were arrested? You left them to carry on your work?” After a moment of silence, he asked, “What is your Plan B?”

Jesus replied, “There is no Plan B. I’m counting on them. They won’t let me down.”<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus called Simon and Andrew. Jesus called James and John. Jesus calls you and me. He calls us to become part of his team and he is counting on us to work together and to continue to carry on his work of bringing love, peace, mercy, compassion, hope, and justice to his world, one day at a time, one person at a time.

Let us pray

O God, you call us and you send us. We are grateful that throughout history, you have called us to be part of your team. Simon and Andrew, James and John responded to Jesus' call and immediately followed him. Today you find us not by a lakeside but like them, you find us right where we are in the middle of our lives. You call us in the middle of a pandemic and in the middle of a national crisis. You call us in a time of turmoil and a time of change. You call us in a time of danger and a time of hope and possibilities. Help us to hear your call and to respond as Simon, Andrew, James and John did. Help us to remember that we are part of your team and that you need each and every one of us and help us to respond with trust knowing that you will guide our way. Amen.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Charleston, Steven. [Ladder to the Light](#), p. 35

<sup>ii</sup> Gorman, Amanda. "The Hill We Climb" The Inaugural poem shared at the Inauguration of President Biden on 1/20/2021.

<sup>iii</sup> Source unknown. I was unable to locate a source for this story but have read it in different locations.

<sup>iv</sup> Based on a prayer by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar for 1/19/21