

The Church: A Place for Disciple Making

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This Sunday's texts:

1 Kings 19:19-21

1 Timothy 1:1-5

Matthew 4:18-22

The holy gospel for today comes to us from the gospel of Matthew, the fourth chapter:

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 send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

The gospel of the lord. We're now going to see a little bit of what God has been doing in the life of Saint Timothy's from 60 years ago [slide show of photos from the past 60 years]. Thank you, Beth, and all those who brought pictures and made suggestions for squeezing 60 years into 5 minutes. Naturally, there's a lot of what has happened in the life of Saint Timothy's that was not reflected in those images, but we are grateful today for the amazing and monumental ways in which God has worked in and through this congregation. We know that the God who has brought us this far is the same God who holds our future. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for each person through whom you have worked to make this an amazing people of God and amazing community of faith. Lord, we know that we've been through good times and we've been through bad times. We know that good times and bad times lay in our future, but we continue to be in your hands. We have seen your amazing faithfulness in the past and we trust in and embrace that faithfulness for our futures. Bless us this day and each day to come that your love and goodness and gospel and truth would shine through us for all of those who would see us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We know when we celebrate the church, when we celebrate the anniversary of a congregation, that, in truth, that congregation has already been standing on the shoulders of the many, many, many who have gone before us faithfully following our Lord Jesus Christ. We call ourselves an apostolic church because what we are meaning by that is that we are following those who follow Jesus. Those who learned from Jesus and were commissioned by Jesus to be the church in the world are our ancestors and we follow in their faithfulness, seeking

to continue to find ways for God to do that monumental work in and through us this very day. There have been other times in history like the times we have faced recently. In many ways, this is new, but in other ways, there have always been hardships in the world and the life of God's people. And yet God has remained faithful and so we know and trust and count on the fact that God will remain faithful to us and through us as we continue forward as a church and as a place of disciple-making.

I referenced earlier this reading of the handing off from Elijah to Elisha and the fact that God continues his work through generations. God did not complete his work through any one person, but rather he intends to continue that work through the generations. Every parent and grandparent is fully aware of our desire to extend the goodness of God into the next generations and through those next generations to the ones that follow. We continue to be committed to our youth and young people. We continue to be blessed richly by the youth and the young people who are here today, sharing God's love with their smiles and doing all sorts of things to help us out as the youth did this last week at the Vacation Bible School. We are grateful for how God shares his love in the gospel through them.

We're also mindful that the work of the church is a challenge. When Jesus first went out and found those fishermen along with others, he invited them to "come and follow" And always when the call to come and follow is heard, it means something has to be left behind. It's a calling to a life of priorities, where we recognize the call of God in our lives is being a higher calling than some of the other things that we're doing at the time. Very often when we make those decisions, they are difficult. We, like some of the disciples, like Elijah, need to go back to the people we're working with at the time and say, "thank you" and "God be with you, as I move on to this next chapter in my life." Those are never easy words. Those are never easy separations. I say that because I believe with all my heart that each one of us as believers is blessed with a gift by the Holy Spirit and called to serve God in our lives.

One of our highest callings is just to discern what that call is. As a people of God, very often the clarity for the call to each of us as individuals comes through the family of God around us, who say to us what they see in us that God can do through us. In part, we discern the will of God for our lives through those who love us and are also committed to God working through their lives. That's a part of our calling. As Jesus was, in a sense, handing off the church to them, as Jesus was about to go to the Father, as he was about to be ascended into heaven and

seated at the right hand of God, he said to his disciples “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all that I have commanded you.”¹ He handed off the mantle of the Gospel to his followers and he does that yet today.

He also did it by giving us a command and this is something that's critically important for us as a church to remember in the context of our culture this very day. Often when people get what they want or don't get what they want, they seem to respond with violence, celebrations of destruction. There's an argument that has been able to go deeper and become more caustic in the midst of differences in our community. So I remind you, especially when you're talking with people who disagree with you, that we do so following the Greatest Commandment of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves. It's not just doing the right thing that we're called to do. It's not just saying the right thing and communicating the heart of the Gospel. It's also saying it the right way, at the right time with the right attitude and tone and that is a much higher calling. I don't know if any of you are like me, but God has put into my life a spouse who has been called upon on many, many occasions over the entire 30-plus years of our being together that my tone is not always appropriate. I'm starting to think that the church needs more of those reminders that how we say what we say about God is almost as important as what we say and sometimes creates the opening for those who are hearing to be able to truly hear and understand the goodness and love of God.

The truth is this call to discipleship, this call to love of neighbor has indeed been in the heart of St Timothy's from its beginning days. Now, I haven't known all of the pastors of Saint Timothy's, but I certainly knew Pastor Gordon Selbo and Pastor Dan Selbo and I know that each of them had an incredible heart for Jesus and a heart for following Jesus in the Great Commission and according to the Great Commandment. So this calling, that is upon us as a people of God, as we move forward from the 60th year, in many ways, is consistent with the same heart we've always had. It's taking forth the same calling, the same work of God in the world around us.

As a matter of fact, back in 2010, I learned in the congregational profile that I read when, a few years ago, you put that congregational profile out on the internet, Pastor Dan Selbo did an intentional shift to focus even more deeply on discipleship as the foundation for who we are as a church. I believe that God intends to continue that same emphasis, but I also want you to understand what

¹ Matthew 28:19-20

exactly that means. It means a couple of things. Among them is this. You are a disciple whose life demonstrates being a disciple to those who are not yet disciples, meaning God intends to work through you.

I also want to acknowledge that some of you have not yet recognized how that's going to happen. Some of you have not yet seen the gift of God in you, so that you can go, "Yes! I have this gift from God and I am called to this kind of ministry in his name," so I say to you. Talk to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask them what they see in you that God has placed there to his glory and honor.

I want to remind you of something else. This is Saint Timothy's Lutheran Church, meaning we're the church that is named after Saint Timothy. I know that was brilliant. I know. I am sorry. I know that most of you hadn't realized that yet. Saint Timothy was Timothy who was a disciple, if you will, under Paul. Paul mentored Timothy up to become a leader in the church. When we see the letters of St Timothy, they are written to Timothy in Ephesus, where Paul is continuing to support and encourage and guide Timothy as he leads the church in that very difficult mission field. How many of you have been to Ephesus? Ephesus was a place of many deep-thinking philosophies that were secular in nature. Ephesus was also a place of many idols to be worshipped. So they weren't particularly interested in hearing about one true God. Yet Paul writes Timothy and encourages him to continue to be a leader in that church. And, like many of the letters in the New Testament, he also tells Timothy to teach no other doctrine, to remain true to the faith, and to not be led astray by the culture and the ethos of that community in Ephesus.

The other thing I know of Gordon and Dan Selbo, as pastors, is that they were both deeply committed to staying true to the word of God. They were both committed not to allow themselves to drift into the latest and greatest things. For that and what I said before about being deeply committed to following Jesus, it is an incredible honor to serve here at St Timothy's, to continue the legacy that has been at the heart of this congregation for many years.

However, it's hard in this valley to stay true to the truth of God's Word. There are many and many even other churches who would call us to compromise that truth, to call us to be more open, to be more inviting to other people by changing or dialing down what we believe, rather than staying true to it. But that's not who St Timothy's has been. That is not who St Timothy's is. We will continue to teach the truth, in love. And we pray that our tone, we pray that our character, we pray that our friendships will open the door for that truth to be heard in the loving way God intends to send it. We're not going to pay attention

to those other tangents that may be happening in the world around us. We're going to stay true to the faith.

Yet as you saw in the pictures, God, over the years, has made a lot of changes at St Timothy's. I mean every few years you're building a new building. Every few years, you're buying another piece of property. Every few years, you're adding another staff person. All in efforts to continue to reach more and more people with the good news of the Gospel. And we're going to continue to look for ways in which God calls us to do that.

One of those ways again, this is going to be a repeated theme this morning, if you haven't already picked it up, is through you. We believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in you. You may recognize that as a very new work or you may recognize that is something that has been churning in you for years and years. The work of St Timothy's does not primarily happen here in the buildings or even out on the front lawn in the dunk tank. It happens first and foremost in our homes and then in the community where we live and work, as we have an opportunity to demonstrate the goodness, the grace, the love, and the truth of God in our relationships. So there's this calling, as we look at what Paul said to Timothy. There's this calling for us to deepen relationships, to understand that the reason we stand on the truth is both because of and for the purpose of loving one another more fully. It's not just to be right. It's not just to be correct. It's not to win the argument. It's to maintain the truth of love and goodness that God demonstrates and the sorrow that comes when you turn away from God's intention for his people, for his creation.

We've heard this phrase numerous times over the last few years. That is a calling for us "To know the Father, to grow as disciples of Jesus, and to go with the Spirit." As I've already indicated, a part of what it means to go with the Spirit is to live out of the gifts that the Spirit works in us. It also means to keep pace with that Spirit, not to run out ahead of him, and not to run behind him, but rather to be in step with what the Spirit is doing, in the midst of the congregation and the community and through our lives. If we don't continue to grow in our own allegiance to Jesus, it will begin to weaken. If we don't continue to seek to grow in our knowledge of God, other ideas will begin to seep their way in.

Not to bad-mouth the seminaries, but I remember so clearly, as I journeyed through seminary. I'm going to admit this; so don't stone me or anything. There were times in the midst of my seminary studies that my personal devotional life waned a bit. It was always interesting that when they came back, usually because I was struggling in some way or another, there seemed to be a corrective in the

word of God from the classes that I was being taught. In the classes I was being taught, I would be taught ideals. I would be taught theologies in their purity. And then, when I would read the Bible, it says well don't go off the cliff too far in that direction. You got to stay rooted in the word of God. So if there are any among you, which I doubt, but if there are any among you that thought you learned everything you needed to learn in Sunday School and Confirmation and you haven't taken a Bible study since then, you've probably drifted a bit. It's good to be rooted in the word of God, especially in this time of pandemic, in this time of social upheaval. I ask you. I pray. I urge you. Please continue to find ways to get your eyes on the scripture. Continue to find ways for God to speak his truth into your life through his word. Our daily Bible reading plan, and by the way, we're right at the end of the first half of the year, and there are new bookmarks for the next quarter that start on July 1st in the narthex, encourage you to continue to be in the word of God and, furthermore, to be discussing that with one another, so that your ideas can be rooted and cultivated by the ideas you share with one another.

Because the second important thing that needs to happen now in the life of St Timothy's is our fellowship must be renewed. Our relationships must be strengthened. Having gone through this Covid time of separation and distancing, there's still a number of us who are not back. Maybe you're watching on the internet. We need one another because God uses us to affirm and create opportunities for one another to serve and honor him in our lives. As a congregation, we will not be able to do that which God calls us to do unless we allow God to do within us what he needs to do to prepare us. A part of that is found in our love for one another.

And then to continue. Continue this journey that all that we do, we do to the glory of God. Continue this journey with gratitude in our hearts for all that God has done. To give thanks to God for the work that he has done, for the work that he is doing, and for the work that he will do in the years to come. The foundation is solid here in this place. The current reality is that St Timothy's is filled with gifted, deeply capable people of God and that means that God has something richly in store for the years ahead as he sets us free, to bring hope, to bring the truth of his word, to bring the love of Christ to this community. It is good to be St Timothy's Lutheran Church. It is good to be a people of God together in this community. I give you thanks. I give God thanks. Amen.