

Trice Gibbons
Second Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN
January 22, 2012

Scripture:
Psalm 62:5-12
Mark 1:14-20

“Come After Me”

Facebook status update from yours truly, Monday December 19, 2011, 4:30 p.m.,
“Grades are in...looks like I will be invited back to Vanderbilt Divinity School for another semester. I need God to check back in regarding where this adventure is leading. A reminder to my friends...I believe that we (that includes you) are God's "feet" and "hands" on earth; therefore, God may be expecting for you to "weigh-in" regarding this discernment process.”

Message in my e-mail inbox from the Reverend Blake Spencer, Tuesday December 20, 2011, 10:00 a.m., “I will be out of town on January 22. Please prayerfully consider preaching at Second that Sunday”...Do you hear Jesus calling from the shore?

Today's New Testament reading from the Gospel of Mark picks up the story of Jesus' life at the very beginning of his public ministry. Two weeks ago, we heard the story of Jesus' baptism, and we remembered our own baptisms. Immediately following his baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels. And now, after the arrest of John the Baptist and Jesus' emergence from the wilderness, the author of Mark signifies the shift to Jesus' public ministry with Jesus' first public sermon. Jesus declares the good news: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ “God is here. Game on. Let's get to it. Amen...” so to speak. And now comes the story so familiar to many of us—a favorite Bible story of our childhood. Jesus standing on the shore calling to the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John...”“Follow

me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus.

Now, we have some advantages that these fishermen just did not have. We can read ahead. According to the gospel, these men set down their nets, set aside their careers and followed Jesus BEFORE Jesus began healing the sick, giving sight to the blind and driving out demons. It’s not like Jesus had a “rock-star” reputation that drew these men to him. “What did these people see in Jesus?,” you might ask. I am going to imitate Jesus here by, instead of answering the question directly, flipping it around and asking another question, “What did Jesus see in or know about these people?”—these seemingly ordinary people who would carry forward the good news and carry on Jesus’ ministry here on earth. Clearly, Jesus saw something. What does Jesus see in us individually?— each of us who has been uniquely made in the image of God with ordinary and extraordinary gifts and called into discipleship?

Jesus said, “Follow me...” The word “follow” in this passage is the English translation of the Greek phrase *deute opisō* which has the connotation of “Come after,” as in to follow in succession. So, Jesus called to the disciples “Come after me” suggesting that Jesus was already at work establishing a succession plan for his work and ministry here on earth. And, because we have the advantage of being able to read ahead, we know that these fishermen did what Jesus asked. They followed or came after Jesus, carrying on the ministry and teachings of Jesus in Jesus’ name empowered by the ongoing presence of God in the Holy Spirit. As followers of Christ, we, too, are part of that succession. Jesus calls to us, “Follow me...”

Years ago, I stopped referring to myself as a “Christian.” Too many self-proclaimed “Christians” spread a message of elitism, privilege and thinly-veiled hateful bigotry that is, in actuality, not Christ-like at all. Instead, I began referring to myself as a “Follower of Christ,” an

alternative suggested by the Reverend Steve Hancock during his ministry among us here at Second. You may certainly make your own decision about how you refer to your faith commitment, but in accepting Jesus as the son of God and in thanksgiving for God's gift of saving grace through Jesus, you have accepted Jesus' call to "Come after me"—to spread the good news of the gospel through words and actions, to minister to the sick, to work for justice on behalf of the disenfranchised and to care for the poor—to carry on Christ's work here on earth in the name of Jesus.

I have to admit, I am feeling a lot of empathy with the fishermen. I certainly did not immediately drop my net...or...rather...my healthcare management career...or leave my family behind, or follow Jesus without knowing how the story of Jesus unfolds in order to enroll in Divinity School. However, I finally gave in to the voice of Jesus calling "Follow me..." as expressed through the voices of many people within this specific community of followers and of many others within the body of Christ who I have been so very blessed to know. Perhaps Jesus sees something in me that I did not see in myself, and it was you who gave voice to Jesus' call, "Follow me."

Sometimes the voice of Jesus calling sounds like the individual, earthly voice of Jim or Cathy or Jeannie or Michael or Blake or Kim or Stacy or Martha or a chorus of many voices. Sometimes Jesus' voice sounds like that of a guest at Room in the Inn or a vendor for "The Contributor" or a person in the first phase of the ordination process within the Presbyterian Church (USA) who is denied the opportunity to proceed based solely on his God-gifted sexual orientation. I had become very adept at ignoring those voices, allowing the volume of a busy, hectic, comfortable life to drown them out, developing a long litany of excuses. Oh...believe me...I am still very good at turning up the volume and developing excuses. However, what I

discovered after taking the first step out of the boat and onto the shore is that I had been attempting to limit a limitless God. Possibilities have developed that I never thought possible. So...you may be thinking, "Well, good for you Trice." If so, I will remind you of my Facebook status update: "I need God to check back in regarding where this adventure is leading. A reminder to my friends...I believe that we (that includes you) are God's "feet" and "hands" on earth; therefore, God may be expecting for you to "weigh-in" regarding this discernment process."

Or...you might be thinking..."But Trice...I don't hear the voice of Jesus calling." I'll take a risk here and say, "Perhaps you aren't really listening." Perhaps you have turned up the volume of your life so high you cannot hear it. Are you really listening to the voices around you?

Or...you might be thinking..."But Trice, I feel called to be exactly where I am, doing exactly what I am doing...in a boat...pulling in fish" OK. The great follower of Christ and reformer Martin Luther broadly defined vocation as a means of serving God. He asserted that one's vocation encompasses all of one's life and is the means of serving God and neighbor in everyday activities. Luther used the example of a cobbler serving God through serving his neighbors by crafting well-made shoes—certainly a necessity and a service to God's children. John Calvin, a major influence on our own Presbyterian tradition, also broadly defined vocation. He believed that followers of Christ are not saved by their own works, but in order to perform works—works in Jesus' name. These definitions of vocation call members of the body of believers—the body of Christ on earth—to full participation in the incarnation of God...to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ Listen for and respond to Jesus’ call that comes through the voices around you. Some are calling for help with Room in the Inn, some are calling for shepherds for the Peaceable kingdom or advisors for the youth, some are calling to bring meals to the sick, some are calling to end bullying in our schools, some are calling to address economic injustice. Continue to help each other to listen, hear and respond. We are all called to be disciples, to spread the good news through our everyday lives and works...to follow Jesus. St. Teresa of Avila wrote in the 16th Century:

“Christ has no body on earth but ours;

Ours are the only hands with which Christ can use to work,

Ours are the only feet with which Christ can go about the world,

Ours are the only eyes through which Christ’s compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world.”

Amen.