

Sermon: Disciples Text: Luke 5:1-11 Annual Meeting Sunday, February 10, 2019
Rev. Steve Clifton- Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON

Today after church we hold our annual congregational meeting. And one of the first things that we will do is to make a motion where *members* of Rideau Park allow *adherents* of Rideau Park to vote on the motions that will be part of the meeting.

Are you a member? Or an adherent? Well in our congregation we have plenty of both.

In the United Church there are rules that are bigger than our congregation- denominational rules. In the United Church we have members. People who have been confirmed, or made a profession of faith and who have been recorded as members of a congregation. If you move from one congregation to another you can get a piece of paper that says you are a member and take it with you to the new place so that your membership can then reside there.

And then we have adherents. These are people who are active participants in the congregation but who have not taken steps to become members.

And this system with its designations is not without its problems

- You can be a member and never come to church. /You can be an adherent and be here every Sunday.
- Older generations valued formal membership, joining up. Younger generations see participation as the thing that defines belonging.
- To vote on congregational business the rules say that the members present have to extend the vote to the adherents present. We do it at every congregational meeting in every United Church. Legend tells of a United Church in Niagara Falls that only had adherents in their pews, so when they had meetings there were no members to make a motion that would allow all those adherents to vote.

The idea of membership as we have it in our rules now is rooted in a particular understanding of how people come to be part of a church. First you believe. You profess faith following certain formulas, or creeds... Then you learn to behave, to live and act as a person in a faith community. Then you belong. You are a part of the community of faith. So... make a profession and join the church and figure it out until you belong. Believe, behave, belong. This is the traditional model of church participation.

But the emerging model for church participation is different. Its "Belong, Behave Believe." You join in, you learn the ropes and do the work, and then over time more and more you believe. In the emerging model faith is a product of life in the faith community. It's not a key that gets you on the door. The traditional model is "Believe, Behave, Belong." The emerging model is "Belong, Behave Believe."

And the new model is actually a very old model. The idea that a profession of faith, or an assent to a set of beliefs is the first step to take as you enter a faith community is just a few centuries old. Religious scholar Karen Armstrong goes so far as to say that with the Enlightenment, the

Christian faith was *reduced* to a formula of belief. Before that, faith was always holistic, learned in community, shared in its practice.... Belong, Behave Believe as a model for being part of a faith community is new and it's very old.

So are you a member....? An adherent....? How about a disciple...?

In the gospel shared today Jesus calls disciples. Simon Peter, James and John have been fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They had been out all night and had caught nothing. Jesus asks them to do a crazy thing. Go back out and try again.

Galilean fishermen had several kinds of nets. In daylight they used the kind of webbed netting that we probably think of when we think of a net. At night they used nets of solid canvas called trammel nets, kind of like a big sheet. In the day the fish would see and then run from the fabric net. At night these canvas nets were invisible. And it's these night time nets that Simon, James and John are cleaning that morning. Jesus tells them to go back out with their nocturnal netting to catch fish in the light of day. Crazy.

When Jesus proposal bears incredible crazy success, with more fish than one boat could hold, Simon feels worried. Who is this Jesus? And... Simon feels inadequate. If Jesus calls him he isn't feeling up for the task.

Then Jesus invites the three fishermen to do an even crazier thing. Follow him. Become his disciples. Become fishers of people.

Simon, later named Peter doesn't make a profession of faith for a couple of more chapters in Luke's Gospel. But the journey begins; he follows Jesus on the way. "Don't be afraid" Jesus says. "They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Last weekend on Saturday night we had more than 300 young people here in our sanctuary for the annual Worshiplude service. And our Moderator, Richard Bott spoke to everyone about being a disciple. He pointed out that being a disciple is not like being a student. It is not about learning what the teacher says. It's about following the teacher and learning what the teacher does. It's like eating breakfast with them in the morning...joining them on the morning commute... and sitting with them in the staff room when they are on break...eating lunch with them...watching them cook their supper... To be a disciple is about following, imitating the example of the teacher.

So member... or adherent...we are all of us disciples, trying to follow in the way of Jesus. And look where Jesus goes with Simon and James and John. Leaving the beach, Jesus does all sorts of crazy things just in the rest of this Chapter in Luke: he risks reaching out and touching an unclean leper, risks being seen as unclean himself to make the leper whole and to bring this outcast inside the community again; he heals the sick and offers forgiveness to one burdened by guilt; he breaks with convention and calls a hated tax collector to be his follower; he eats with people who are not seen as worthy of his company, and challenges the world view of those in authority...

And his new disciples are there to see it all.

So together, member, adherent... whatever category we fall into, we are all disciples, following Jesus on the way... May God bless us as we follow Jesus together into this New Year.

Amen