

Meeting Jesus (Again) for the First Time
Rev. Steven M. Conger
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Matthew 4:18-22

As he (Jesus) walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Last week Matt shared a bit about his experiences in Guatemala in 2013 and 2015.

I know that he was disappointed that he was not able to go with our mission team on this last trip --- but I was thankful that I could go.

I want to thank Nancy --- and you --- Meridian Street Church --- for allowing me to have this amazing opportunity.

I have participated in dozens of mission trips through-out the years.

But some trips have really stuck out more than others

- Appalachian Service Projects as a youth was one of the pivotal moments in my life --- and quite possibly one of the reasons that I am standing in front of you this morning
- Jamaica, as I shared a few weeks ago, as a newly ordained pastor clarified my calling unlike anything I have ever done --- and gave me the strength to keep going
- Taking a group of youth to Nashville Tennessee and sleeping in an old warehouse in the skid row district wondering how many rats I would encounter each evening.
- Taking a group of youth to Oklahoma to work on an Indian Reservation, and visiting the Oklahoma City memorial shortly after that tragedy
- Haiti prior to the devastating earthquakes --- shook me out of my comfort zone in ways that I still have not completely overcome
- And of course Guatemala

Each of us has encountered Jesus in our lives.

For many of us, that first encounter with Jesus came when we were children.

Certainly that is true for those of us who grew up in the church

But I don't think that you can grow up in our society without having some encounter with Jesus.

Even if it is not very clear or precise

For many of us, that image of Jesus that we claimed as children --- remains intact in many ways as we grow older

- Sometimes it is held with deep conviction
 - Sometimes with just warm personal devotion
 - And other times it is tied to rigid doctrinal positions
- For some --- this image of Jesus that we developed during childhood can become a problem

- o Producing doubt
- o And sometimes leading to indifference --- or even a rejection of the religion (the Jesus) of their childhood
 - I have seen this in many of my childhood friends

It is as if there came a time in their lives when the childhood image of Jesus no longer made sense.
 Any unfortunately --- nothing was there to replace it

The result is too often a walking away from Jesus and the church

But I have come to believe (and even witness in my own life) that we need an opportunity to meet Jesus again --- almost like meeting Jesus again for the very first time.

The Jesus I follow today is very different from the image of Jesus that I had as a child.

It appears to me that there are two primary (or widespread) images of Jesus in our culture today --- maybe one of these is your image of Jesus

The first image --- what Marcus Borg calls "the popular image" sees Jesus as the **divine savior**.

This image seeks to answer three questions about Jesus
 Who was Jesus?
 What was his mission or purpose?
 What was his message?

The answer to those questions calls one into a state of believing.

Who was Jesus?
 Divine son of God
 What was his mission or purpose?
 To die for the sins of the world
 What was his message?
 His message was about himself: his identity as the Son of God, the saving purpose of his death, and the absolute importance of believing in him.

Borg calls this a *fideistic* image of the Christian life --- one whose primary dynamic is faith -- understood as believing certain things about Jesus as true.

Belief should lead to a great deal more, but believing is the primary quality of this image of God.

The second image, which is only slightly less common, is the image of Jesus as **teacher**

This is a de-dogmatized view of Jesus

It is held by those who are not sure what to make of the doctrinal claims made about Jesus by the Christian tradition.

Once you set aside those doctrinal claims --- what remains is Jesus as a great teacher

The image that flows out of this understanding of Jesus consists of "being good" --- of seeking to live as Jesus said that we should

Borg calls this a *moralistic* image of the Christian life.

The problem with both of these images is that they are not only inaccurate but they are incomplete images of the Christian life.

The Jesus of the Gospels is ultimately not about BELIEVING or BEING GOOD.

The image of Jesus of the Gospels is about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation.

The question is how do we enter into that kind of relationship with Jesus that will allow transformation to take place?

Not simply a relationship where we know about Jesus
But a relationship in which we surrender our very selves to the grace that is Jesus

In our scripture this morning Jesus is inviting strangers to come and join him on this adventure.

In *The Message*, Jesus says it this way:

"Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.

I read that story with incredulity

If that was ME, what would I have done?

Would I have followed Jesus?

Would I have set down my life work?

Would I have surrendered all that I had and begun this new life?

The reality is, they had the CHOICE --- they didn't have to follow --- but they chose to follow
They could have simply walked away

Every day Jesus is offering you and I the opportunity to become followers --- the opportunity to meet Jesus in a brand new way

But the truth is --- we can come to church

We can call ourselves Christian

But remain spectators

We take in the sights and spectacles

We listen to beautiful music

Hear great sermons (especially when Matt is preaching)

But we remain UNCHANGED

We don't surrender all, drop what we are doing and follow Jesus

Every day --- Jesus is inviting us to not be simply a spectator --- but to participate

I just got back from Guatemala

Today is the first day that I am starting to feel human again

They worked me hard

Moving and laying concrete block

Making cement and moving it bucket by bucket
We would be sleeping by 9pm because we were so exhausted
But it was a good exhaustion

We knew we were doing something that was going to make other's lives better

But in order to do that --- we (I) had to say YES

What I love about mission trips is that, at least for a time, you remember why you fell in love with Jesus in the first place.

Now I know we can't all go to Guatemala

But we can fall in love with Jesus who (I promise) will give us other opportunities to be transformed

The only requirement is that we can no longer simply be a spectator.

We must actively engage in ministry through:

Prayer
Service
Justice

I was reminded of a story that I first heard almost 35 years ago when I was a student at Duke.

Fred Craddock, the greatest preacher of his generation, and one that I have sought to model my preaching style on, came to Duke. During a sermon he shared a powerful story about Albert Schweitzer --- the great explorer, doctor, and organist ---

He shared:

I think I was twenty years old when I first read Albert Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus*.

I found his theology woefully lacking – more water than wine.

I marked it up, wrote in the margins, and raised questions of all kinds.

I read that he was going to be in Cleveland to play a concert of Bach, dedicating a new organ in a big church up there.

According to the article he would remain after the concert for conversation and refreshment.

I bought a Greyhound bus ticket – (Craddock was living in Knoxville, TN) – and went to Cleveland.

All the way there I worked on his book, laying out all my questions on sheets of paper.

I figured if there was conversation following the concert, there would be room for question or two.

I went there; I heard the concert; I then rushed into the church fellowship hall, got a seat in the front row, and waited with my questions.

After a while, Dr. Schweitzer came in

shaggy hair, big white mustache, stooped, and seventy-five-years old.

He had played a marvelous concert.

You know he was a master organist, medical doctor, philosopher, scholar, lecturer, writer... everything.

He came in with a cup of tea and stood in front of the group.

And there I was, right in front, with my questions.

Dr. Schweitzer thanked everybody, saying, "You've been very warm and hospitable to me. I thank you for it. I wish I could stay longer among you, but I must go back to Africa, because my people are poor and diseased and hungry and dying. I have to go."

Then he added, "We have a medical station at Lambarene. If there is anyone here in this room who has the love of Jesus, would you be prompted by that love to go with me and help me?"

And what I remember most from that sermon that Fred Craddock preached at Duke was his response.

He said he looked down at his questions and realized how absolutely stupid they were.

And then he said: **"I learned what it meant to be a Christian, and had hopes that I could be one someday."**

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Barbara Brown Taylor has written:

"Following Jesus means receiving our lives as gifts instead of guarding them as our own possessions. It means sharing the life we have been given instead of bottling it for our own consumption. It means giving up the notion that we can build dams to contain the bright streams of our lives and letting them go instead, letting them swell their banks and spill their wealth, running full and growing fuller."

I invite you to meet Jesus again --- maybe for the first time.

You don't have to Guatemala, but you have to follow and allow Jesus to use you and change you.

Let us pray:

Loving God, when I hear your call for my life, too often I respond that I am too busy, or I want to respond on my terms. Help me to meet you again. Help me to begin to build a relationship with you in which I surrender myself to your love --- one in which I allow you to change me. I love you Jesus, teach me, I pray. Amen.