

The Same, Yet Different
Matthew 4:17-25
October 26, 2008

In the summer of 2007, the Philadelphia Phillies celebrated their 10,000th loss. They are the losingest team in the history of baseball. Yet now they are in the World Series. Same team, yet different depending on which statistic you want to concentrate on. Senator John McCain and Senator Barak Obama are both leaders in this country, both US senators, both important men, both candidates for president. Yet in two weeks, one of them will be the next US President and there will be an important difference between them that doesn't exist right now. That person will be the same man, yet different. There once was a teenager named David who was the youngest in his family and he kept the family sheep. He was last in rank behind all his brothers. But one day the prophet Samuel came and looked over all the boys in David's family, and after examining them all, anointed David as the next king of Israel. He was still a teenager, still subjected to his father's rules, still picked on by his older brothers, but he was different because the Bible tells us that from the day he was anointed and onwards, the Spirit of God came on him in power.

In this story from Matthew 4 which we've read, there are 4 men who are all fishermen. They are in the process of fishing when Jesus comes along and calls them to come follow him. They leave their nets and boats and follow Jesus and from that time on they are not just fishermen but fishers of men. The same, yet different. If you haven't picked it up yet, the theme for this sermon is "the same, yet different." We're looking at the Church today, the people of God, the people who have been called to follow Christ and to live in relationship with God.

People have all kinds of notions about what it means to be a Christian and to be part of a church. There are all kinds of expectations and ideas that we all hold about church and church people. When I'm at Neshaminy on a Sunday morning, I expect that they are going to recite the apostle's creed and there will be organ music with the hymns. I know when I'm in Lancaster among the church people out there I expect to see them dressed a little more conservatively than

people in Philly. I expect to hear 4 part harmony as they sing the hymns rather than organ music. I expect them to act like they don't quite know what to do with me when they find out I'm a pastor from Philly who is also Mennonite like them. Because we're the same, yet different. But none of those things is really important to our identity as being people of God. Our identity as the Church isn't about our music, our clothes, or whether we are conservative or liberal. It isn't about being Mennonite either. What makes all of us distinctive as the Church is our relationship with Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 4:17, Matthew writes that "from that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" From what time on? Looking back a few verses we see that from the time Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been arrested and put into prison, he began to preach throughout Galilee, saying "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This was the same message that John the Baptist had preached. But it's different this time because Jesus is preaching it and he is the one John came to prepare the way for. The same message, yet different.

Jesus' first word is repent. That word means to feel remorse, to be converted, to change direction, to change your mind, to turn away from something and turn to something else. Repenting is a prerequisite for experiencing the kingdom of God. Jesus is calling people to change. He wants them to do something different. They've been sinning, they've been living apart from God, and now Jesus is telling them stop that, turn from that, because the kingdom of God is near and when they turn, they will experience the kingdom of God. When John preached this message people came from all over and asked him, "What must we do?" and he told them to share their food and clothing with people who had none, stop cheating people and extorting money and stop accusing people falsely. These were all important things for people to do to demonstrate repentance. It's not true repentance if we keep on doing the same wrong things.

How many of you when you were a kid would fight with your brother or sister or cousin or friend down the street, and Mom or Grandmom or someone

would make you apologize? What good did it do? I would apologize to my brother or cousin and still be thinking how I was going to get back at them, and I would the first chance I got. That's not true repentance. True repentance involves a change of heart, mind, attitude and action.

There was a change in Jesus' life before he started preaching. In Matthew 3 we see that he came to John the Baptist to be baptized. John wanted to refuse him because he needed to be baptized by Jesus, but Jesus told him "let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." After that, the Holy Spirit came on Jesus, a voice from heaven spoke and said, "this is my son whom I love" and the Spirit led him out into the wilderness to be tempted. After he returned from the wilderness he heard that John had been thrown in prison and he began to preach. He was no longer just the carpenter from Nazareth, but rather the Spirit filled overcomer of temptation, the acknowledged Son of God, and he had a message for the people. The time had come for him to begin his public ministry.

Jesus then began to call specific people to make a change in their lives. We see beginning in verse 18 that, as he was walking along the sea of Galilee he saw Peter and Andrew casting their net into the lake because they were fishermen. He called to them to come and follow him and he would make them fishers of men. Now this was not the first time Jesus had ever laid eyes on Peter and Andrew. We know from the gospel of John that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He had met Jesus before when Jesus came to be baptized. Apparently Jesus had spent time with all these men and they had an expectation that he would invite them to join him as his disciples. They were just waiting for him to tell them it was time to begin.

You see, Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher. And this is the beginning of his work as a rabbi. Before this time, he probably worked in carpentry because that's what his father Joseph did. As a rabbi, he chose his own disciples and taught with authority. So the invitation goes out to Peter, Andrew, James and John. He tells them to come and follow after him. He's going first and they are to follow him. I think this is important because it shows that we all as disciples of

Jesus, follow after him. We model him. We do what He does and go where He goes. The words that Jesus uses clearly indicate that they are being told to come and follow behind him and he will make them into fishers of men instead of just fishermen. They will be the same, yet different.

These 4 men immediately leave their stuff and follow Jesus. They were ready for the invitation. A few weeks ago I preached at Neshaminy on a story that Jesus tells in Matthew 22 where a king threw a wedding banquet for his son, invited a bunch of people and they refused to come. They had businesses and land to tend to and couldn't be bothered. He kept sending servants to the people to tell them to come to the banquet and they abused and killed the servants. So the king attacked and burned their cities, then sent his servants out to the street corners to invite anyone they could find to come to the banquet. Now who do you think those servants found on the street corners? Businesspeople and landowners? No, they found the same type of people who hang on the street corners today. And those people came to the banquet and the king provided them with wedding clothes and walked among them, talked with them, and celebrated his son's marriage with them. The point is that the invitation has gone out to be Jesus' disciples and it's gone out all over, to the businesspeople, landowners, and those standing on the street corners and whoever comes to Jesus finds a welcome. Not only do we find a welcome, but Jesus makes a radical change in our lives.

When we accept the invitation to come follow Jesus, that is an act of repentance. We turn from living our lives apart from God, our sins are forgiven and we begin to follow Jesus, doing what He does, going where He goes. We still look the same, we still have the same likes and dislikes, the same talents, the same strengths and weaknesses, but we are different. Like David whom I mentioned earlier, when we turn and accept the invitation to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes upon us in power and we are changed. Now the Spirit of the Living God is within us. Pastor Peter preached a few weeks ago from Jesus' prayer in John 17 and in that prayer Jesus prays for us at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church saying "I pray also for those who will believe in me through

their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” When we turn to Jesus and live in relationship with Him, the Spirit of God is within us and we are different.

These 4 men were still fishermen but now they were also fishers of men. When we come to Jesus there is much about us that stays the same. I still like to sleep in whenever possible. I still like to read a lot, watch movies, eat chocolate and ice cream especially if they are together in some combination. But since I began following Jesus I’m also different. I’m not quite as self-absorbed. I’ve learned to focus on other people. I’ve tried things I never thought I could do. I remember when I was about 14 or so, telling Jesus, “Okay, I’ll follow you, but don’t ever expect me to witness to anybody. I can’t do that.” I’m sure the Lord got a chuckle out of that one. When we repent, when we turn from what we’re doing wrong and turn to Jesus, we’re the same, but now different.

These 4 men changed what they were doing. They turned from their nets, their boats, their family even, and turned toward Jesus and followed him. And Jesus took them all over Galilee. He taught in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. The change didn’t stop. Everywhere Jesus went there was change. People heard the scriptures taught and explained as they never had before. Mark tells us in Mark 1:22 that the people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one having authority, not as the teachers of the law.” People suffering from all kinds of sickness and disease were healed. The paralyzed were healed and could move and walk again. Epileptics were healed and no longer suffered seizures. Those suffering with severe pain were healed and could move freely again. They were the same people, yet very different because they had an encounter with Jesus and he changed them.

As I was reading this story in Matthew, I was struck with the movement in this story. Jesus comes near the disciples, calls them and then moves out again throughout Galilee. And then people from all over come near to him to be healed. There is a movement in and out throughout this story. As Jesus comes near to us, we are to respond by following. As we follow him, others will be drawn near. That is how the Kingdom of God expands. The reign of God spreads as more and more people answer the call to come follow Jesus.

These 4 men followed Jesus for 3 years. The night before Jesus was crucified; they were with him in the upper room celebrating Passover. This was the Jewish feast that commemorated when God brought the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and established His covenant with them making them His people. Each part of the meal was to remind the people of the experience in Egypt and they were to teach the children the story as they asked questions about the different foods. There was salt water which represented their tears and sadness at being slaves, there were bitter herbs which represented the bitterness of slavery, there was the lamb which reminded them that the blood of the Passover lamb was put on the doorposts of their houses to protect them during the last plague. But Jesus took this meal and changed it. He took the Passover bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples telling them to take and eat it, it was his body. Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks and then gave it to the disciples, telling them all to drink of it because it was his blood of the new covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins. It was the same Passover feast, with the same food and drink they always had. But now it was different. It wasn't about Passover anymore but about the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ which makes it possible for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be restored to a right relationship with Almighty God. We've been delivered from a slavery much more bitter than the Israelite slavery in Egypt. We've been delivered from slavery to sin and death.

We are going to celebrate communion in a few minutes. As we celebrate, we remember that Christ has called us to be in relationship with him, to follow after him doing what he does. Each one of us who have accepted Christ's

invitation to come follow him have been changed in some way. We are the same in many ways. We may have the same likes and dislikes, many of the same interests, the same talents and abilities, yet we are also different. We can use our talents and abilities in new ways as we relate to each other. We can share interests with others who are following Christ. We find that we each have an important place in God's family and that we need each other. Most importantly we have the Spirit of God living in us. God's presence goes with us everywhere we go. God's strength and peace is available to us without any limits. God opens up His word to us and teaches us about Himself. He speaks to us and listens to us. He allows us to cooperate with Him in reaching out to others. And as we live in relationship with Christ and each other, others are drawn to Christ and accept his invitation to come follow him.

As Pastor Peter comes now to administer communion, let's keep in mind that because of what this represents, the new covenant sealed with the body and blood of Christ, we can come and live in right relationship with God, following Christ.