

## WE WERE NOT BROUGHT BY THE STORK

Scriptures: John 1:35-46; II Timothy 1:3-12

This morning I want to begin not with our second scripture lesson but with a story. I will get to our second scripture lesson in a moment. In his book *Lake Wobegon Days* Garrison Keillor describes what I call the gumball theory of procreation. He heard it from his childhood friend Jim. He writes,

Jim believed that God sort of generally watched over the world but didn't try to oversee every single detail. He said that, for example, when you're born, you could be American or Chinese or Russian or African, depending. In heaven are millions of souls lined up waiting to be born, and when it's your turn, you go down the chute like a gumball to whoever put the penny in the slot. You were born to your parents because, right at that moment when they Did It, you were next in line. Two seconds later and you could have been ... a Communist (pp. 11-12).

Most of us have gotten beyond such ideas when it comes to how we were born. We know we were not dispensed like a gumball. We were not brought by the stork. We were given life by people, not only the people who conceived us but the people who raised us and taught us how to live.

The same is true for faith. No one acquires faith by osmosis. No one is given new life in Christ by the stork. Just as God works through human beings to give us life in the first place, so God works through human beings to give us eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Our second scripture lesson illustrates this. Before I read it, let me compare how the gospel of Mark describes the story of Jesus' calling his first disciples. In chapter 1 Mark says,

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

That's what I call the gumball theory of discipleship. Jesus puts in the penny, and out comes a disciple. Jesus calls, and the disciples follow. That's it.

There is a reason that Mark tells the story that way. You are here this morning because Jesus called you. That's it. It is not because you are special or your parents are special or even because this church is special. You are here because Jesus wanted you here. Why did Jesus choose you? I don't know. I'm still trying to figure it out. But that is the story.

But it is not the whole story. Now turn to our second scripture lesson from John 1:35-46 (NT, p. 92). John tells the same story about Jesus calling Andrew and Peter to be his disciples, but he tells it in a very different way. John 1, beginning at verse 35:

The next day John [the Baptist] again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Do you see the difference? In John’s gospel, Jesus does not just walk up to the disciples and say, “Follow me”; the disciples are referred to Jesus or brought to Jesus by others. This continues in the next paragraph—verse 43:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

That sounds more like Mark’s gospel—the gumball theory of discipleship: Jesus walks up and says, “Follow me,” and Philip follows.

But look at what is said in the next verse—verse 44: “Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” Why do you think that little detail is inserted at this point? I think it is to tell us that Philip heard about Jesus from Andrew and Peter. Jesus did not call Philip out of thin air. Philip was brought to Jesus by Andrew and Peter.

Then Philip invites Nathanael—verses 45-46:

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Nathanael is a hard-core skeptic. When Philip tries to tell him about Jesus, Nathanael says, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” That’s like saying, “Can anything good come out of Potlatch?” The pastor search committee wondered that about 20 years ago. Philip does not argue with him; he just says, “Come and see.”

In our first scripture lesson Paul writes to Timothy: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” Faith did not come to Timothy via the stork. It came to Timothy through his parents and grandparents—people who cared enough about him to share their faith with him.

But our parents and grandparents in faith do not always have to be our parents or grandparents. My own faith was certainly shaped by my parents and grandparents. But it was also shaped by many different Sunday School teachers and youth group leaders. I particularly

remember one Vacation Bible School teacher I had when I was in second grade. It was in the early 60s, and the theme was space exploration. Joe Bruce would have loved it. I loved it. It was one of the most fun weeks of Vacation Bible School I ever had.

At the end of the week after learning about many events in Jesus' life, my Vacation Bible School teacher asked if any of us would like to say a prayer inviting Jesus to come into our lives as our Savior and Lord. Now my parents were faithful followers of Jesus who always took me to church and Sunday School, but my parents would have never asked me a question like that. It just would not have felt natural to them to ask me a question like that. But my Vacation Bible School teacher did. She asked us if we would like to say a prayer inviting Jesus into our lives, so I did. A few of us stayed after class and knelt down beside our little chairs and we prayed after our teacher that Jesus would come into our lives and make us his disciples.

In second grade did I understand what that meant? Of course not. I am still discovering what that meant. But that Vacation Bible School teacher made Jesus personal to me in a way that my parents were not able to do. Of course I would not have been in Vacation Bible School if my parents had not taken me and if my mother had not taught one of the other classes. But sometimes it takes someone besides your parents to help you see what following Jesus is all about, and that is why we have all those names of Sunday School teachers and youth leaders and children's program leaders listed in the bulletin this morning. It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a village to nurture a child in faith. And you can be part of that village. You can be one of those Vacation Bible School teachers who forever changes the life of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader who may one day become a minister.

It does not have to be difficult. Did you notice in John's gospel how simple is the process of sharing faith? When those two disciples of John the Baptist first come to Jesus, Jesus says to them, "What are you looking for?" He did not ask, "Whom are you looking for?" He asked, "What are you looking for?" People find Jesus because they are looking for something—something more than the scramble for success, riches, or romance that is offered to people on television. To share your faith you don't have to ask someone, "Are you saved?" "Do you know where you will spend eternity?" Ask them, "What do you hope for in your life?" and then listen.

In response the disciples say to Jesus, "Where are you staying?" Is it just me, or does that seem like a strange response? The disciples do not say to Jesus, "Explain who you are, answer our questions, resolve our doubts, show us what you can do for us." That is not what they say to Jesus. They say, "Where are you staying, so we can stay with you."

To share your faith with others—and this applies even to teaching Sunday School or Vacation Bible School—to share your faith with others you do not need to answer all questions, resolve all doubts, or provide solutions to all problems. All you need do is invite people to hang out with Jesus. That's what Jesus does. He says, "Come and see." He invites them to come with him and get to know him.

That is what I am inviting you to do today, and what you can invite other people to do. You don't need to have Jesus all figured out in order to follow him. You don't need to have all your questions answered or answers for all the questions other person might ask. If you do have

questions or you hear questions asked by someone else, write them down on the Questions of Faith insert. But you don't have to have all these questions answered in order to come or to invite others to come. Just come. Come and see. Hang out with Jesus in this place where Jesus meets us, and allow yourself to see what he can do in your life.

- Ken Onstot  
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