

The Journey©

Luke 9:1-6

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Tomorrow we will be celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For most of us we will remember Dr. King for his "I Have a Dream" speech delivered during the march on Washington in 1963. Or his participation in the 1962, protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that attracted nationwide attention through the television coverage of the police responding with high powered hoses and the use of police dogs on the protestors.

In addition, we will see people being interviewed or giving speeches like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton who marched with Dr. King. Or some ten minute radio or television news piece about Dr. King and his life ending with the men pointing away from the hotel where he was shot.

But what if I read names like Claudette Colvin, Vera and Darius Swann, Orsel and Minnie McGhee, Gordon Carey, or Irene Morgan? I would be surprised you would know any of them (pause) unless you told me you knew a lot more than the common person about the struggles of the African Americans in the United States, the topic of civil rights or liked reading about the history of our country from the 1940's through the late 1970's

Although these names may not be familiar with us they did have an impact on changing the United States from the 1940's through the 1970's in relationship to civil right. Let me share a couple of their stories with everyone to show the impact they had on history.

In 1944, Orsel and Minnie McGhee bought a house in Detroit's near the west side, a purchase that led to the landmark United States Supreme Court decision affirming the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment for people of color.

The house bought by the McGhee's, was in a neighborhood that had an association agreement including a covenant restricting that only whites could occupy these homes. The McGhees, who were black, were told they had to move. Despite threats and abuse, they refused. The association went to court to have them removed, and the local and state courts, upheld the covenant, ordering the McGhees to leave the property within 90 days. Upon hearing the news the McGhee's took their case all the way to the Supreme Court of the United State where they eventually won because their rights were not being protected under the 14th Amendment.

What is even worse is it took several more court cases and laws to prevent similar discrimination of others until the Title 8 of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, called the Fair Housing Act was passed by Congress four days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. As well as The Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 requiring banks to apply the same anti-discriminatory guidelines to their lending practices.

My next example happened in March 1955, after a fifteen-year-old school girl in Montgomery, Alabama Claudette Colvin, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in compliance with the Jim Crow laws, a group of laws in the South that enforced racial segregation. But if I told you on December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat. You would remember she was the person in history who was the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The only reason Claudette Colvin didn't get the credit that Rosa Parks receives was because the people leading the boycott felt Parks, who was a seamstress had a spotless reputation and was a better face of the boycott than Claudette, who'd was a pregnant and an unwed mother. But the truth be known the federal lawsuit filed brought by Claudette and three other women made the landmark Supreme Court decision happen in 1956 of outlawing segregation on public transportation.

My last example happened in Charlotte, North Carolina, where in the mid-1960s less than 5 percent of African American children attended integrated schools or had busing because the white officials used busing to maintain segregation. This all changed when The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sued the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district in April of 1971, on behalf of Vera and Darius Swann. Who were the parents of a six-year-old child that wanted to allow their son to attend an elementary school closest to their home? The federal district judge ruled in favor of the Swann's and oversaw the implementation of a new busing system that integrated the district's schools.

These true stories we have just heard about happen because of ordinary people taking action to make changes not just for their lives but for other people's lives. Some could even say they were the disciples of their times by using their power to destroy the demons and cure the hatred. By shaking the dust off their feet like the Jewish travelers would do when they returned home. See the Jewish people would typically shake the 'unclean' dust from their feet after coming home from their journey through pagan lands. It was a statement that the place had no status among God's people. By rejecting Jesus' a town placed itself outside the community of faith. This is, therefore, a formal act of separation, leaving the town to the judgment it deserves for rejecting the gospel.

Nothing has changed over time from when Jesus called the 12 disciples to today because Jesus is still calling people to be the new disciples of their times. When people hear Jesus calling they are still nervous like they are on their first date when their hands were sweaty and at times they are at a loss for words. Maybe they are not sure if they are making a true change or are the correct person to be called to be a disciple. But this is when they need to remember that Jesus is with them the same as he was with the 12 disciples he sent out into the world to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. They must remember that through pray, listening for Jesus' direction and following the path that Jesus has set for them they will have a greater chance of success.

As a denomination and a church we have been blessed with people who are fulfilling the call to be the new disciples of today by going out to where the people are to start new communities. By taking this true call and heading out with no staff, bag, house or money to really sustain their

new ministries these disciples have the faith that what they need will be provided by both others and God for their ministries.

To see some of disciple's of our denomination we can easily take a look through the Presbyterian websites called the 1001 worshiping communities from around the United States. Some of these communities have come in the form of having formally chartered congregations; Bible study groups with no structure or ordained leadership; fellowships, which meets regularly with some structure but which may never develop into formal congregations and the list goes on.

To really understand what this all means let me tell you about some of these new disciples and the ways they are going about proclaiming the kingdom of God that is different than the same old way we have being doing things in the past as a denomination. Please also note that I have also taken these stories directly from the website and have made some minor adjustments to the content for today's sermon.

Now with that said: Around a 100 years ago, a group of faithful Presbyterians built a little brick church in Indian Valley, one of the most remote and beautiful corners of Floyd County, Virginia. It has always been Presbyterian; it has always been small (never more than 50 members); and it has always been mission minded.

Through the years, generations of families have worshiped God and served the community. Several times the old brick church on Macks Mountain Road has had to close its doors because the congregation grew too small. But with the help of family, friends, and other churches willing to see something new be put in place they have given some seed money to build a new kind of church community.

They even start out on their web page by asking:

What dose bluegrass, rocking chairs, banjos and potlucks have in common?

These are the keys to making up the new community called the Wild Goose Christian Community, which is a brand new nontraditional worshipping community in Floyd County, Virginia. (Slow) Were pews have been exchanged for rockers, organs for fiddles, and yawns for songs.

The Wild Goose Christian Community is a brand new non-traditional worshipping community who has a simply purpose to reach out to those that might never have darkened the door of a traditional church, and to talk about the Good News of Jesus Christ

So each week they get together on Tuesday and have a potluck dinner. Then they go into the church and sit in the circle of their rocking chairs. They start out by having communion, singing songs, praying, and then they share in a discussion of the word of the Lord instead of a sermon.

Another new community is called the “Big Table” Pastor Kevin Finch preached his final sermon at First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Washington with tears in his eyes, Finch, who had been moonlighting as a restaurant critic, told the congregation he was resigning to start a new ministry with those he’d come to love in the food service industry.

The next day the stock market began to drop. On Friday he went to his wife, Karen, to see whether he should try to get his job back. “I was worried,” he says. “So many people who liked my idea and were planning on supporting the ministry were taking huge hits financially. I had three kids to support.” Karen told him, “Kevin, you’ve been called by God; if you run out of money in two to three months, you can always find a job selling cars.”

Her words kept him grounded. He began to remember how God had led him to this point—what the senior pastor had said when he tried to create a hybrid position as part-time associate at the church and part-time pastor to the restaurant workers. “He basically said: ‘Kevin, you have to make a decision. We need a full-time associate. It sounds like what you’re dreaming about also requires a full-time person.’”

Kevin’s dream for a new community came from him noticing how isolated the food service industry is, which impacts an incredible number of people. It’s the largest industry in the country. These people tend to work when most people are off or sleeping. They spend most of their time with each other. They’re not very connected to anyone else in the community.

The industry has a high rate of drug and alcohol abuse, divorce and broken relationships, with a huge numbers of ex-felons, who can’t pass a background checks. So he began to wonder, “Who is caring for these people?”

In November of 2006 he sat straight up one night at 2 am trying to figure out if he was hearing an audible voice or was it in his head? “Kevin, I need a pastor for the restaurant industry. Are you interested? A Bible was open in front of him to Act chapter 2. What he saw was, “They ate together, if anyone had a need they cared for each other,” and then, “The Lord added daily to their number.” Then he heard: “That’s how you pastor—feed them, care for them. Then watch what I’m going to do.”

After doing this for several years Kevin has now reflected back and said God is always there. It goes back to the beginning of the communities first dinner. When we asked folks, “Who’s hurting?” God was helping us set up a relational screening system. Folks in the industry know who has a legitimate need and who knows how to work the system. Instead of filling out a bunch of forms or launching an inquisition, we can go to the person and say, “We heard you need this; how can we help?” This gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work in their lives; plus it protects their dignity—they didn’t have to ask for it.

And lastly I would be without remorse if I didn't mention the Keepers who minister to student athletes at the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University and Concordia University through a community called the Athletes in Action. Since 1966, Athletes in Action has been using sports as a platform to help people answer questions of faith and to point them to Jesus. They believe that sports have the power to open doors and create connections in a way that few other things can. They have a dream of a day when there are Christ-followers on every team, in sport. For them this is possible when organizations and individuals -- want every athlete to know someone who truly follows of Jesus and work together towards the common goal of furthering God's kingdom.

Throughout the different generation Jesus has been calling disciples. Today we have heard how people in past and current generations are picking up the staff and walking in faith with Jesus. They have done this within their communities by actions of change and sharing the kingdom of God with others they come in touch with-. As we can see from some of these stories today, life has not always been easy when trying to crush the demons and cure the diseases of the times. But when we listen to what Jesus is both saying and teaching us as we are walking through these communities we will be true disciples of Jesus.

So I leave you with this statement and questions -Jesus is still calling people to be disciples the same as he did when he was sending out the twelve to cast out the demons, heal the diseased, and proclaim the kingdom of God. Do you hear the call of Jesus through these examples given today during the sermon today? Do you hear the call through the service or the music that has been played? Do you hear God asking you to support his new communities and/or disciples? Keep your ears and hearts open because Jesus could be calling you the same as he did the 12.

Amen-

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