

Stand By Me

Matthew 9 – Jesus and “Sinners”

October 10, 2010

1. **Stand By Me**

I have often thought that the gospel is not much more than standing with one another in the name of Jesus. It is not so much about what we say or what we do – it is about being with one another in Jesus' name.

The other week Andrea Smith introduced me to Dylan Goggs and I met him on Hastings and Cordova area of Vancouver. He is a Regent College grad who has served the last 5 years at Sutherland Church in North Vancouver. He sees himself as a pastor to marginalized people in a gritty area of Vancouver. He says it feels like home. I would like to figure out a way “to stand by him.”

You Tube – Stand by Me (5 min) -- video

2. **Local Missions**

Local missions demonstrate the love of God in practical ways.

When I first thought of how to define local missions, it was helping others through partnering and working together to meet the physical and spiritual needs of those in our community.

But local missions may be informal – I believe that each one of us is a missionary when we walk alongside others, when we are there for others, telling and demonstrating God's love. Whether it is building relationships over coffee, or replacing a light bulb for your older neighbour, cleaning a back yard, growing food for those in need, helping with home repairs or driving someone to an appointment, taking time to smile and share a moment with a stranger ... simply sharing the gospel of God by word and by deed. (Jocelyn Pedder)

Philemon 4-7 “ Every time your name comes up in my prayers, I say, "Oh, thank you, God!" I keep hearing of the love and faith you have for the Master Jesus, which brims over to other believers. And I keep praying that this faith we hold in common keeps showing up in the good

things we do, and that people recognize Christ in all of it. Friend, you have no idea how good your love makes me feel, doubly so when I see your hospitality to fellow believers.” (The Message)

3. **Let’s join in on a story that is already going on.**

- Jesus is collecting a group of followers called disciples. It is with these people that he intends to change the world.
- And he is meeting people where they are. He is not walking through shopping malls or sitting on the beach – he is going where people are neediest. In chapter 8 of Matthew:
 - Jesus heals a man with leprosy (“Lord if you are willing, you can make me clean.”)
 - Centurion’s servant – this is a Roman warrior / he is not a Jew – but he has the same kind of compassion for his servant as God does for people – “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”
 - Cost of following Jesus – “the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”
 - Disciples on the lake – “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!”
 - Healing two demon-possessed men – demons were cast out into a herd of pigs.
 - Heals a paralytic – “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” – “This is blasphemous!” – “Get up take your mat and go home.”

4. **Joining in on the Story (Matthew 9: 9-13)**

⁹As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

- In every narrative there is God's story.
 - a. God saw Matthew. This is how it all started. And God saw his heart.
 - b. Most of us look at the other's behaviour and judge that. We look at ourselves and judge us by our intention or motivation. God always looks to the heart.
 - c. Jesus calls him and then he goes to his home. And not only just to visit but to break bread with him and his friends. Here is a righteous man joining in on the story of some of the most unrighteous and hated people.
 - d. But he has his reasons. He says: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
 - e. He says "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."
 - f. He wants us to figure this out. God has an inordinate preference for the least, last, lost and nearly dead.

- In every narrative there is my story / the person's story – Matthew's.
 - a. Jewish tax collector – hated because he took money from his kinsmen to empower their captors and abusers.
 - b. He is what the Pharisees call a "sinner" or an outcast from the Synagogue. Note that Jesus does not call them this – it is the religious professionals that call him that.
 - c. He is easily judged. I bet most of his working life he was paranoid... and at home he was angry and depressed. Hated people get this way.
 - d. Matthew gets called – and something changes in his life – he gives up his identity as a hated, paranoid and depressive tax collector.
 - e. Someone engaged him. Someone stood by him.
 - f. Calls his friends – nothing more natural than this. He was called by Jesus and his life has been changed ... so he calls his friends.
 - g. Somebody stood with him.

- In every narrative there is the other's story.
 - a. Pharisees – these are the educated, middle class of that society.

- They were the people that every mother wanted her daughter to marry. They were professionals, money-earners and well-healed.
- b. They knew who was in and who was out. They had categories, clearly defined. They new how you could stand with and who you could sit with.
 - c. But they are not there to sit, to participate in a meal. Or to stand for change. They are there to find fault with Jesus. They have heard about what he has been doing and they want to put him to the test. After all – he claims to have healed sick people, touched lepers, forgiven sins, delivered demons out of mentally ill people and now – worst of all – he is having Thanksgiving with drug addicts on the downtown east side.
 - d. And here we have obsessive-compulsive fault-finders trying to catch Jesus in doing something wrong when he is in the process of doing good.
 - e. If you read a bit further you will also discover that there is another group on the fringes of this dinner party. John the Baptist's disciples are fasting ... and they are a bit upset that Jesus is eating while John's disciples are fasting.

I would like to tell you another story before I tell you some factors that I have learned about local mission, or living our Christian life in an everyday way ...

5. **The Story of St. Patrick (my namesake)**

- Some 1,500 years ago a teenage boy from what is now Great Britain was kidnapped and enslaved by marauders from a neighbouring country.
- The invading marauders came from fifth-century Ireland. The teenager they captured eventually escaped, but returned voluntarily some years later. In the meantime, he had become convinced that he was handpicked by God to convert the entire country to Christianity.
- Apparently, he was right.
- In the process of converting the primitive people of Ireland, however, the former slave experienced a conversion, too. In the years that followed, he not only shared God with the people of Ireland, but also grew in his understanding of God through them.

- And so it was that a young Briton named Patricius died an Irishman named Patrick. And neither Ireland nor Christianity was ever quite the same.

- The Roman way said that a person has to believe before they can belong. The Celtic way said that a person must belong in order to believe.
- Therefore, the Roman process of mission was —
 - i. Preach the Christian message.
 - ii. Call to a decision for Christ.
 - iii. Invite into the fellowship of the church.
 - iv. Focus is on an “in” group vs and “out” group.
- In contrast, the Celtic was is to —
 - i. Invitation to a healthy community.
 - ii. Engagement in ordinary life (including faith).
 - iii. Welcome to a shared belief and a shared life.
 - iv. Focus is on hospitality and welcome.

~~In the Celtic community, "seekers" often came to Christ in a matter of days or weeks or years as a result of participating in the life of the Christian community. Some never did and they continued to be welcomed and in fact stayed.~~

Now this is different...

- Groups of Christians would come in to Patrick and live with his community. Care for the villages and land – became a haven of peace and sanity.
- Vicious and warring – neighbours to Vikings and other tribal groupings.
- Build a settlement – logs and thatched roofs. Groups of Christians build a community – treat each other well and care for the land. Monasteries – peace and sanity in a world of chaos.
- People would hear about it and would come for help / compassion. Widows – no means of support. Sick and needing healing. Some would move in with them. They would open their homes. Build them cottages.

- Many cities in England, Ireland and Scotland started this way. They understood the gospel through living in the community. They became Christians and they expanded city by city. Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England. Extended eastward onto continent.
- Refused to bring theology and language and culture from the Mediterranean. Arguments: did not bring “Trinity” arguments or “form and substance” arguments from Greek philosophy. Patrick showed the shamrock – this is trinity -- and it made sense. Three leaves one clover – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Authentic faith grew for several hundred years. Between 200 and 900 these communities spread across all of Europe.

6. **I would like to show you two factors of missions and ministry — I think of it as “Christian life in an everyday way.”**

1. The process factor – it is not now nor has it ever been “1-2-3 now you’re free.”
 - **A:** Some people think that there is only one way to become a Christian. One stage conversion process. Many of us know this – discovered that we were living poorly, met Jesus Christ and our lives were changed. // Carole would go year after year to Anvil Island Day Break Point Bible Camp – throw her stick in the fire and “Today I have become a Christian and I have never regretted it since.”
 - **B:** being filled with the Spirit – first one (conversion) turns the ignition and the second (baptism in the Holy Spirit) one gets you out of the driveway. // Going to hear Young Hi Cho – Largest Church in the world.
 - **C:** third one can’t remember the time, making progress, lots of ups and downs but don’t know what one was the right one. // I would say my own kids are this way. David counts when he was baptized at age 12 as his time of conversion but he has just done that arbitrarily as a response from people that need a time and a place.
 - **D:** smooth process, FORMULA GROWTH – 1-2-3 now your free. “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” I don’t know anybody in the Bible that didn’t struggle with his or her relationship with God. I don’t expect it today.

- Whatever church you go to you will replicate your ABCD approach. We at CapChurch are just glad that it is happening.
- Often it is A or B – event focused. This made sense 50 years ago especially in the US and this has profoundly affected how we understand the gospel. Everyone knew the gospel in the small towns of America – they had been raised on the bible, with prayers in school and at home – and when they sinned they knew what to do. Confess and repent. And at church — the preacher or evangelist would come and call you to commitment and faith in Jesus Christ and you felt badly for what you had done and you changed.
- So one time decisions were really important in the last 150-180 years but it is less relevant today.
 - i. We live in a culture where our highest value is tolerance.
 - ii. Our neighbours and friends are multi-cultural.
 - iii. The Bible is not permitted in class rooms.
 - iv. Many families have forgotten how to pray and don't attend church except for Christmas and Easter.
 - v. People have been turned off with religious scam artists and hyper-evangelists that seem in it for money, sex and power.
 - vi. Researchers tell us that it takes 15-17 positive and relational contacts with Christians prior to them thoughtfully considering the claims of Jesus Christ.
- At CapChurch we focus less on one time events and emphasize the process. This is how Jesus did it.
- Read the parable of sower and seeds. Jesus not focusing on just the moment or the event or the measurement but the whole process. **He was concerned that people become genuinely fruitful.**
- **More about disciples than making decisions.** Not just say a prayer – it is the praying and living and enduring and rejoicing that is important. We want you to have assurance of your salvation but we want more for you. Our interest is a truly fruitful human being that will multiply into the lives of others. We believe that you are designed to leave a legacy for the rest of the world to applaud – not just get a ticket on the gospel train.
- Discouragement is part of the process. It is not to be avoided or

- ignored and it does not mean that faith was not genuine. It is a relationship and a process.
- How you integrate failure in your life is an important part of your growth in faith.
2. **The community factor** – accepting people where they are so that they can become what they could be.
- a. People are converted to community first and to Christ following. The bible says that it is “the love that you have for one another” that really causes a person to consider Jesus Christ.
 - b. This has to do with authenticity. The world does not need more Christians acting superior and treating others in inferior ways.
 - c. You will not see perfection at CapChurch. Far from it. But you will see love, the capacity for change, arguments and quarrels, failing one another but forgiveness nonetheless, not sameness but reaching across behaviour.
 - ~~d. The church should be like a Celtic village – you don’t have to believe to belong. If you belong long enough you will believe.~~
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Stand by Me

Benediction: From Fists To Feasts: the Thanksgiving You Celebrate

Over Thanksgiving this weekend, I would like you to hold your closed hands in front of you. Look at your hands and examined the strength. Feel some of the tension as you keep them securely closed. And then, slowly, open one finger at a time as you return to the Lord one thanksgiving after another. You might wish to do this for Thanksgiving dinner or for a time of sharing following your feasting. (Paddy Ducklow)
