



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

January 27, 2008

Epiphany 3, 2007

The Christian faith today is usually thought of as a belief system. Churches have their own degrees of belief and focus so what tends to happen today is that when somebody is looking for church they visit around until they find a church that has a similar belief and focus. They stay there and call themselves Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic, whatever.

Yet in the New Testament we find a completely different concept, because in the New Testament the primary emphasis is not on a belief system, but on a way of living.

When Jesus found these 4 fishermen by the Sea of Galilee he did not ask them to accept a creed. He did not ask them to believe in the New Testament. He did not ask them to join his church. What Jesus did was to invite them to follow him. And they did. For these first followers of Jesus to follow him had both a geographical and physical meaning because they followed Jesus to all the places he went. But the primary meaning of the words is not physical or geographical. They are spiritual. Those disciples accepted the invitation of Jesus to a new way of living. This exercise of faith that launched the Christian movement was well before creeds, books and the Church. It wasn't a belief system to be passively accepted. It was an adventure to be daringly undertaken.

To be a follower of Christ was something to be done.

Now I am not saying that believing is unimportant. Obviously these 4 men believed in Jesus enough to leave their families and their businesses to follow him. But their faith was not some passive acceptance of a creedal statement. It was the beginning of an adventure when they walked from their boats and hit the road with Jesus in the lead.

They made a decision to give his kind of living a try.

You know in every aspect of our life there comes a time when thought and theory must be tested by experiment.

For instance people had wondered for centuries whether a machine that was heavier than air could fly. A few speculated it might and most thought it impossible. Then one day, in Kitty Hawk, Wilbur and Orville Wright gave it a try. Sure enough their crude machine lifted off the ground and flew. Not very high, not very long, but it flew. That question could never have been answered by speculation, discussion and theory. It had to be tested by experiment.

The same applies with our spiritual life as well. The most important questions cannot be resolved by discussion or study. Questions like does the way of life Jesus taught and lived make sense for me?
Is it the truth?

Does it work?

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We could talk about these all day long but the only way we will ever know is by moving the questions from talking about them into the world of doing them.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be reading from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

One of the most amazing things about that sermon is that almost everything can become an action that can be tested in real life.

Jesus talks about an indestructible good will that can be shown to all people. Even those people we do not like. That is do-able.

He urges the highest regard for all human beings and asks for them never to be looked upon as people to be used. That's do-able.

Jesus talks about an attitude of generosity that voluntarily does more and gives more than life demands. That's do-able.

He speaks of an attitude of non retaliation that never seeks revenge no matter how badly you have been wronged. That's do-able.

You see Christianity is do-able. It is not a speculative faith to be discussed or pondered. It is practical ideas that can be put into action.

But will they work? Can you actually live like this?

Well we will never know until we put it to the test and see for ourselves.

The Christian movement started when Jesus asked 4 fishermen to join him in a courageous and a creative adventure of living.

They did things that most people would not think of doing and their style of living was certainly different to those around them. But look what happened.

The Christian faith in its earliest form was something to be done. If we are to be followers of Christ we must start with that and continue with that throughout our lives.

The invitation of Jesus to those 4 fishermen to follow him is the same invitation that Jesus gives to us. Follow me. I have a new way of living. Will you give it a try?

Will you give it a try?

Amen.

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