

Sunday, January 29, 2017

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

Broad Series: Grounded (The life of Jesus in four parts, Exploring Jesus as the incarnation of God in the created world, and how that gives salvation an earth grounding.)

Series Part 2: Dirty Feet: Jesus' earthly life.

Sermon #5: "Walking ahead of Jesus"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

Scripture: Luke 10:1-20

Text: Matthew 10:6 "Go to the lost sheep, the people of Israel."

Sermon Blurb: We often think of Christians as following Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples, He called them to follow Him. Yet, early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus sent disciples on ahead of Him, to go before Him. They were to prepare others to receive Jesus when He comes. Jesus is still coming into all parts of our world. This Sunday we'll learn how to get out in front of Jesus as the best way to follow Him!

Gathering Song: *10,000 Reasons* - Sanctify

Welcome: - Pastor David

Greeting Time: -Pastor David

Worship Set: - Sanctify

Nothing but the Blood

Those Who Trust

Open My Eyes, That I Might See

Prayers: HCI - Steve R.

The Lord's Prayer

The Kids invited to Kid's Church

Serve Moment: Pastor David

Bluegrass Festival Potluck

Super Bowl Sub Sale

Parent's Night Out Valentine's Day

Offering:

Message Bumper

PP#1: Grounded: Dirty Feet

Walking Ahead of Jesus

"Go to the lost sheep, the people of Israel." - Matthew 10:6

Grounded: God's Dirty Feet. "Walking Ahead of Jesus." Matthew 10:6 "Go to the lost sheep, the people of Israel."

PP#2: *Image of walking a few steps behind Jesus, following.*

We talk about Christians as people who follow Jesus. On one hand, that's kind of hard. By following, we let Jesus be in charge, lead the way. He chooses the path, and we follow. We have to give up control and learn to be happy never quite knowing exactly where we're going. Any control freaks out there struggle with this part of following Jesus? "If only I just knew where we were headed, I would go so much more willingly!" Some of us are back seat drivers. I imagine we do the same when we let Jesus drive!

But on the other hand, it's kinda easier just following. We can slip into not taking too much responsibility for how things are going. "Hey, I'm just following Jesus. He'll let me know what He needs from me. I just keep on doing what I've been doing. I'm just waiting on Him!"

We can use following Jesus as an excuse for not getting too involved. We can kind of hang back and watch from a distance. It means we don't have to try what we might find uncomfortable, or venturing out into areas we don't like. "I haven't heard Jesus call on me to go door to door." "Jesus hasn't opened up opportunities for me to approach those people in my family who are resistant." "I don't find myself in situations where I have to make new friends with people who don't know Jesus." Following can be an excuse not to push ourselves, and stay distant observers of Jesus.

PP#3: *Image for walking with Jesus*

I have come to a disturbing realization as I've been tracing the steps of Jesus. Jesus doesn't just let His disciples follow. He pushes us out ahead, too. That's got me wondering just how much I think I like Jesus.

I mean, Jesus seems pretty cool at first. What we learn about Him, He's pretty amazing. But the more we learn, the more we get concerned. As we walk with Jesus, we find ourselves reacting a bit like the people who lived with Him did.

Jesus is God showing up on earth, in the dirt. He walked in the dust. God became grounded. He calls others to follow Him, walk with Him, get grounded with Him. So, we've been tracing His steps in the dirt, trying to experience Him, trying to learn more about Him, trying to discover who He is, and who we are.

PP#4: *Map B at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>*

Jesus comes onto the public scene at about the age of 30. He had grown up in Nazareth, a village in the town of Galilee, up in the northwest of ancient Israel. And for about three-and-a-half years, Jesus traveled around preaching, teaching, touching, healing, and doing miracles, all proclaiming that God's intended Kingdom had begun. He lived a Godly life giving Himself as an example, pointing to God in all that He did, demonstrating God's inbreaking power, and then earning salvation for all people by dying on the cross and being raised again.

We can divide up Jesus' earthly ministry around the Passover holidays we see He celebrated. Before the first Passover of His public life, He spent some weeks getting ready for His ministry. He left Nazareth, and went down to be baptized by John the Baptist near Bethany. He then fasted for 40 days in the desert, was tempted by Satan, and returned north to the village of Cana, where He performed His first miracle.

PP#5: *Map C at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>*

He then went to Capernaum, which soon would become His new home town and home base. Then, celebrating Passover down in Jerusalem marks His first year of public ministry. He traveled through Samaria to tell non-Jews about God. He went home to Nazareth to reveal that His ministry's purpose was to usher in God's Kingdom. He moved to Capernaum, and He began to call disciples to follow Him. And following Him is all that they will ever do. Right? Well, not so much!

PP#6: *Map D* at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>

He spent the bulk of His first year traveling around Galilee, preaching, teaching and doing miracles. We can call this first year His "Year of Inauguration. People are getting to see Jesus for the first time, learning about Him, and are impressed with His teachings and miracle working. He's the new, rising star. He also assembles His group of 12, full-time disciples. They are all on board by the time He heads down to Jerusalem for the second Passover.

PP#7: Jesus' 3½ Years of Public Ministry (perhaps AD 30-33)

Jesus begins Public Ministry (Beginning months)

Baptism, temptation, calling the first disciples

Year of Inauguration (First Year)

1st Passover (Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem)

Jesus moves to Capernaum and selects 12 apostles who travel with Him

Jesus travels throughout Galilee, preaching, teaching, and working miracles

Year of Popularity (Second Year)

2nd Passover (Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem)

Jesus makes three tours of Galilee, speaking in parables

Large crowds follow Jesus. People want to make Him king.

Again, after this Passover, Jesus heads back up to Galilee. By now He is widely popular. Everyone comes out to see Him and hear Him. They gather by the thousands! And He does not disappoint. He preaches the Sermon on the Mount, He preaches from the boat on the lake. He preaches on the plain. He feeds the 5,000. He works wondrous miracles.

PP#8: *Map E* at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>

His home base is the fishing village of Capernaum. He had made a long tour throughout Galilee the previous year. Now He makes two more tours through Galilee. On the first, not only does He heal the sick, He even raises a dead boy back to life, up in the village of Nain!

PP#9: *Map F* at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>

By the second tour of this second year, however, He starts running into trouble. The Jewish leaders start critiquing Him, challenging Him, not liking how He questioned the religious practices they wanted people to keep. Jesus' message gets stronger and stronger, too, and He denounces whole groups for being selfish and hypocritical. It's the rich and powerful who don't like Jesus very much...those who *have*. The *have nots* continue to follow Him, putting their hope in Him. But before long, nearly everyone begins to realize that Jesus' teachings hits home to them, personally, too. People begin to have second thoughts about following Jesus. And we do, too.

PP#10: Matthew 10 (CEB)

5 Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, "...6 Go to the lost sheep, the people of Israel. 7 As you go, make this announcement: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment."

And then, all of a sudden, Jesus turns to His 12 full-time disciples, and tells them to stop following and go walk out ahead.

I'm sure they just stared at Him blankly. "What? We were just getting used to following. We are observers. We passively watch what's was going on." Jesus, however, sends them out front. Matthew 10, verse 5, "Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, '... Go to the lost sheep, the people of Israel. As you go, make this announcement: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment.'"

Go. Get out there. Go on!

PP#11: Walking Ahead of Jesus

1. We go before we are ready

Pause here for a minute. Jesus is sending His disciples out to go do the same ministry that He is doing. But let's unpack this. This comes in Matthew chapter 10. But notice, it was just in the previous chapter, chapter 9, that Jesus called the last of His 12, full-time disciples. Most of them had only been following Him a couple, maybe a few months. Those with Him the longest had only been with Him for about a year. They had just finally started to gel as a group. They were still so new to it all. Jesus was blowing their minds, and socks off (hence they had dirty feet!), nearly every day. They really weren't even sure who this Jesus was!

And Jesus sends them on out ahead of Him to do God's ministry. Whoa!

Do you think they were ready? Do you think they knew what they were doing? They weren't fully trained! Heck, they weren't trained at all! All they had done was watch Jesus for a bit. What about quality control? Would you have trusted them with this kind of work?

What I see is that Jesus turned to His followers, and sent them on ahead *before* they were ready. Jesus is so OK with this. More than OK, He's the one who pushes them ahead!

Doesn't this get you a bit nervous? Maybe we've committed to follow Jesus. We stay at a safe distance, blending back quietly into the huddle. We're trying to sort out who Jesus is. What does it mean to put your trust in Him? What does that look like?

Then, all of a sudden, we hear Jesus say "Go, get on out there!"

PP#12: *A person looking over nervously at a coworker, hesitant to talk to that person.*

Haven't you told yourself, perhaps a number of times, that you're just not ready? "I can't eat with those people Wednesday evening at church, I don't know them very well. I can't go over and talk to those new people in the church lobby, what will I say to them? I can't go strike up a conversation with my coworkers over break, they talk about such different things. I can't talk to my neighbor about Jesus...they'll think I'm weird." "I can't do that. I don't know how. Other people do such a better job than I. They know how to do such things. I'm not ready!"

Here's the shocking thing I see with Jesus. He sends His followers out way too soon, way before they're ready! He doesn't wait until they are prepared. He sends us out before we are. It is when we are out there doing it that we get trained. The training, the preparation, comes in the doing.

We don't have this excuse. We can't resist the Holy Spirit's nudgings. We have to go and strike up the conversation, to go and engage those neighbors, to go and show up at the crisis shelter, and not wait until we're "ready."

If you find yourself staying too safe too often, you need to stop following so carefully and listen to Jesus and get out there on ahead. Go proclaim to others, "God's Kingdom is near." Go touch the sick, bless those who grieve, fight against the darkness. Work to make the world better.

Now, perhaps you are thinking that maybe Jesus chose the 12 disciples *special* to be apostles. It is they, the full-time ministers, who go out and work on ahead for Jesus. It's the pastors, the missionaries, the career ministers. It's not every follower.

PP#13: Luke 10 (CEB)

10 After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place He was about to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for His harvest. 3 Go! Be warned, though, that I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves.

Well, turn to Luke 10. Luke had recorded Jesus sending out the 12 in chapter 9. Now, in the next chapter, Jesus turns to the crowd of other disciples that were following Him, and sends them out, too. There are 72 of them! Luke 10, verse 1.

"After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place He was about to go. He said to them, "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for His harvest. Go! Be warned, though, that I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves."

PP#14: Walking Ahead of Jesus

1. We go before we are ready
2. Jesus is on His way

There it. It's other disciples, too. They are sent out ahead of Jesus. Notice the key phrase, though. He "sent them on ahead to every place *He was about to go.*" We go and prepare the way for Jesus. We don't just go off on our own doing things our way, hoping for the best. Jesus is on His way, and good stuff happens when He shows up.

Our ministry in the world, off where we are sent each day, is to make ready for people to receive Jesus. We don't have to convince them to receive Jesus. We don't have to sell Jesus and make them want to choose Him. All we do is get people looking for Him, so they will see Him. Jesus makes the converts, we don't. That's the Holy Spirit's job. We just have to live in a way, talk in a way, act in a way that will get people to notice Jesus. The rest is up to them, when they experience Jesus for themselves.

PP#15: Walking Ahead of Jesus

1. We go before we are ready
2. Jesus is on His way
3. We are already equipped

Did you notice that Jesus sent them out in pairs? He doesn't send them off alone. We are equipped with what we need. We have partners. We have others working with us. We don't need to wait for more training, first. We don't have to get better equipped. True, you can't do it all yourself. But you are not by yourself. And Jesus is coming to do the heavy lifting.

The harvest is plentiful, the workers are few. I love this next line. Jesus says, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers." Who is the answer to that prayer? You are! We're looking at the world and seeing, "Man, there are so many who need to know about Jesus. Oh Lord, please send out people to help them look for Jesus. Please, Lord, send people." And what happens is that God answers our prayer. "Yes," says God, "I grant your request. I send you!"

PP#16: Walking Ahead of Jesus

1. We go before we are ready
2. Jesus is on His way
3. We are already equipped
4. We start with prayer

We are already equipped with all we need. But Jesus reminds His disciples to pray. We need to pray. Why? We need our hearts to get into alignment with God. We need to see the need, and yearn for people to know Jesus. We need that inner change of heart, compelling us, motivating us.

Sometimes as followers we don't yearn. We don't ache for others. We are comfortable doing our own thing. Jesus sends us out ahead, calling us to prayer. He wants our hearts broken like His, and then, we will have that inner compelling to go. It doesn't come from a sense of obligation. "I suppose I should go and talk to that person." "Well, if I have to." No! It comes from our yearning. It's like when we see our kid struggling. We don't have to convince ourselves to jump in. We are motivated, from our hearts, to help. That's what we pray for. That's what changes our hearts to can't help but sit next to the person at the table, or the coworker in the cubicle, or the neighbor down the street. We have prayed, and God breaks our hearts, and that is our motivation.

That's why, as a church, as we are discerning our way forward, where God is leading, we have begun in prayer. As we move into this Healthy Church Initiative, we start with the prayer team calling us to prayer. We are praying for God to make our hearts like His, to see others as He does, to work in us that yearning for our world, our community, to experience His Kingdom coming near.

The difference between passive, safe following and out in front going, is prayer! If you want to be a better witness for Jesus, if you want to engage your world better for God, then start today by praying. Use the prayer of examen. Use a daily devotional. Ask someone to be a prayer partner. Get serious about prayer!

PP#16: Luke 10 (CEB)

- 4 Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don't even greet anyone along the way. 5 Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' 6 If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7 Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don't move from house to house.

Well, as we read the rest of this passage, hear again how Jesus' disciples are already equipped. They need no special equipment or training. What they have already is enough. Verse 4, "Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. [Learn to trust in God's provision, not your own.] Don't even greet

anyone along the way. [Greeting here meaning a prolonged conversation...don't get waylaid or sidetracked.] Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don't move from house to house." Be quick to share peace and blessing. Don't worry if it is rejected. If someone offers to put you up, don't be picky. Don't upgrade your accommodations.

PP#17: Luke 10 (CEB)

8 Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'God's kingdom has come upon you.' 10 Whenever you enter a city and the people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 11 'As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God's kingdom has come to you.' 12 I assure you that Sodom will be better off on Judgment Day than that city.

Verse 8, "Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'God's kingdom has come upon you.' Whenever you enter a city and the people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 'As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God's kingdom has come to you.' I assure you that Sodom will be better off on Judgment Day than that city."

It's not your job to make them receive God's Kingdom. The choice is theirs. Your job is to faithfully fulfill the calling by Jesus to be sure everyone knows, has had the opportunity to hear. The dirt on your feet is a witness to your faithfulness.

PP#18: Luke 10 (CEB)

17 The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name."

18 Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. 20 Nevertheless, don't rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven."

Well, the disciples go off. After a while, they return. Verse 17 is their report, "The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, 'Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name.'" God's power came out. They went faithfully, and God did the rest. There were even occasions when they were able to see the results! Jesus explains that this power they saw came from Him. Verse 18, "Jesus replied, 'I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, don't rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'"

There it is again, the temptation to focus on the miracles. God's Kingdom is not ultimately about experiencing miracles. It's in being in right relationship with God.

PP#19: *An image of a field half harvested, waiting and ready.*

We are followers of Jesus. But Jesus calls us out from the back, from passive observation, and pushes us into the front, to active participation. We go before we feel ready; we have to be bold and venture out. We don't have to solve all the problems, we only have to make room for people to see Jesus coming. We have all we need now already, we are fully equipped with Jesus' power and Holy Spirit. It is enough! But we start with prayer. We pray for God to change our hearts.

Following Jesus is dangerous. We can't stay back, blending in the crowd. Jesus calls us to go on ahead. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the Harvest that He will send workers into the field.

Amen.

Closing Song: *Chain Breaker* - Sanctify

Benediction: Pastor David