

Calvary United Methodist Church
July 10, 2011

NOW WHAT?
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Sermon

Joel 2:28



Of all of the children that are present this morning I invite the smallest and the youngest of our crowd to please come forward for our children's message.

Good morning and welcome. Did you all have a great picnic last week and eat lots? When you say "Yes" that's what picnics are for and enjoy our families.

Just two weeks ago twenty some folks of this church went out west. We were with Native Americans called the Navahos and in some of the rest areas and in the stores we saw these things. Besides being a key chain does anyone know what specifically what this is called? They are called dream catchers. How many of you dream? Sometimes we dream about happy things and sometimes we have things called nightmares and we don't like them because they are bad things. The Native Americans make these dream catchers. I would like you who are web savvy or get your parents to take a peak to find out about their true meaning.

I want to talk to you about someone in the Bible who also talked about dreams and visions. His name was Joel and hear these words:

And that's just the beginning: After that—I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: you sons will prophesy, also your daughters. Your old men will dream, your young men will see visions.

Sometimes we hear about day dreams –like oh it's hot an I in school and I wish I were at Hersheypark, or I wish I was at the beach or I wish I was with my very best friends. We can have all kinds of dreams, some of which are absolutely wonderful. But there is some-



thing else called a vision and God gives people visions. The people of this church have many leaders and they had a vision to build and remodel this sanctuary into what it is today. People have visions of what they might want to do with their lives, like God is calling them to do whatever it is they are supposed to do with their life. There are thousands of different things we can do with our lives.

One of the visions that God would plant in our hearts, and I think it is one of the best, is a vision of peace where we love one another. That's a neat vision isn't it: The thought that nobody would ever have an enemy again. Wouldn't that be a great vision? That I would love people no matter what color they are, no matter what race, no matter what language they spoke, whatever country they are from, that there would be peace and that we would have a vision that all of God's children would learn to love one another.



I'm going to give each of you today one of these dream catchers and I hope you will not only dream but I hope you'll get a vision and do what you can to make that vision to happen or to become reality. When you and I chose to love other people and chose to not have any of those isms, like I don't like certain kinds of people or the languages they speak or the way they look, we are a part of making that vision become real. That makes God very happy when we follow through and become people of vision.

I am going to invite you to take a dream catcher today. Check it out on the web and see what Native Americans think of their dreams. Thank you for coming up today and I pray you will catch the vision.

Message

Luke 14:25-27

Last week I chatted about an experience I had in Tanzania meeting a driver who told me he was Muslim and later on told me he really wasn't practicing it. It made me wonder how many times with myself and others think that we have inherited faith but we can't. You don't inherit faith. You can inherit the practice of coming to worship. You can inherit a lot of things from your family that we chose. The title last week was basically that we are living and dying by the choices we

make. I was hoping by the time we left last week, you and I have chosen to be a disciple of the Living Lord, Jesus Christ.

The natural progression for that would be then: What does it mean to be a disciple? To that I have these words from the Gospel of Luke to share with you.



One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, “Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brother, sisters – yes even one’s on self! – can’t be my disciple. Anyone who won’t shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can’t be my disciple.”

Discipleship isn’t an easy travel. For many the journey is difficult. For many it is filled with long-term suffering and for many of us it is not, it’s a wonderful journey. I am going to share with you a brief video about the author, Horatio Spafford, who wrote the words of the tune *It Is Well With My Soul*. Some of you know those words. The videos aren’t always easy to see so I want to tell you bit about his life.

Horatio Spafford was in his forties around 1871. He was a very progressive, successful lawyer in Chicago. In 1871 all kinds of evil things started to happen to him. His son, his only son, passed away at the age of four. Within months was the great fire of Chicago. He had invested all his earnings in real estate and lost everything. He and his wife, Anna, maintained their lives and two years later Anna, Horatio and their four daughters were headed to Europe. They had to go across the ocean in a boat—in those days there weren’t any planes to fly. Business behooved him to stay for a few days so he sent his wife and daughters ahead and said he would join them in two days. In two days he got a note from his wife that the ship had been hit by another ship and their four daughters drown along with hundreds of other people. The message that has gone down in history said “Saved alone, what should I do?” He went on a ship to meet his wife and when they were over the area where the captain told him the other ship went down he wrote the words to this song. He was a man of faith. His life continued and he and Anna came home. They had three more children, one more son who also passed away, and two daughters.

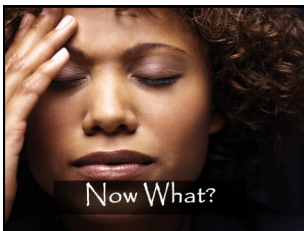
Just ten years after all these things started to happen, in 1881, Horatio and his wife, Anna, and their two remaining daughters felt the call to become missionaries and went and formed the American Colony in Jerusalem to be a witness of Christians to Jews.

I invite you to see this and then we are going to sing these words and I hope you will see what it can mean. Prayerfully none of us will have to go through such terrible things but being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that regardless of what life sends me, I chose to be an obedient follower of Jesus Christ and it will be well with my soul. God will get me through wherever I have to go.

Let us watch this video.

Let us sing together *It is Well With My Soul*.

We have a lot of reasons to know that it is well with our souls. So after we have made this decision, which I hope we all have made that to live and to die means to make a choice for life and make a choice for life means to live for God.



Now the question is, “Now what? I’ve made a decision but what is expected of me?” The scripture that I shared with you earlier is a scripture that is often misunderstood and people struggle with it because some older versions of the Bible would say that we must hate our mother and our father and our spouse and our children and others more than God. It really can’t tell us to hate in one place with Jesus in another place when Jesus says we ought to love our spouse more than our self and that we love God in those orders. It’s not a matter of hate; it’s loving God first, putting God first. If I love God, the Heavenly Father, more than anyone else, I will love my spouse, I will love my children, I will love my neighbors, better than I could have ever done without loving God first. My commitment to God is the one that will teach me the gifts of Gods: grace and mercy and forgiveness. It will give me a sense of peace in my life that I will know how to treat my wife or my husband or my children. It will give me the ability to forget when I am so frustrated I want to yell and scream and sometimes even strike out.





God invites us to make God No. 1 that we might know the priorities in our life. When I think of his call to make him No. 1 you wonder what kind of a God would ask us to make him first. I'm thinking as fathers and mothers at home, don't we expect that of all the other people that our children will listen to they will listen to us first. And then they listen to school teachers and they listen to other forms of authority but we hear things like "I am your parent!"

God is our Heavenly Father. Our Heavenly Father is the one who blesses us, the one who saves us. He is the one who redeems us. He is the one who has a plan for us. He is the one who wants the very best for us if we will step out in faith and trust God to be No. 1 in our life. That's a huge step because it does mean putting other people and other things aside.

Putting God first means that we have to put ourselves on a back burner and in our society that's a tough thing to do. In many societies life is so difficult that every day of life is merely trying to exist; trying to get food to eat and something to cover your body and shelter. In our culture we have enough free time that we can make ourselves feel good with all kinds of things in this life. We work hard that we might earn some funds and then in our free time we might want to do all kinds of things. But God reminds us that if he is No. 1 we don't come first. God comes first. And so we got out and spend all our money freely and all our time freely we have to ask in real seriousness: God with all that you have given me, what it is that you want from me? How would you have me spend the funds that I have earned? How would you have me spend the time that I have is free. In our society there isn't much of that is there? But when we begin to first God first we will be able to put our life in order that will make sense and it will give us peace, not only for today but for all eternity.

One of the greatest things that it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is one of the most difficult for us to understand is that word of sacrifice. Sacrifice. It's the last piece of raspberry pie and there are three people. Do I make a run for it or do I tell them there is one piece of pie left. That's pretty trivial but for many of us that's about the limit of our sacrifice. Sacrifice? What will I do in order to send my children to college? What will I do when I see that there is someone in

our neighbor whose house burned and they didn't have insurance and they really need help? What will I do for people I know who are hungry? What will I do when I see there is an earthquake in Haiti, a tsunami in Japan? What will I do? Will I just take care of me and say their problems are their problems they should have planned?

When I look at the issues of our own congregation and paying off our debt at what point do I say I will just throw in what I can or I can chose to sacrifice. My mind stirs on nights when I am preaching. In the middle of the night I'm thinking, you know three or four hundred families, an extra thousand a year and in a few years we could pay off a few million dollars debt. It adds up real quick with that word sacrifice. Whatever it is that you want to help with. What is it for you to sacrifice, to give of your time? It's not something we often think about.

We have a lot of hangers on in life. Hangers on are the people who enjoy all those other things. They love to send their kids to ball games but they have never helped raise funds for Little League in all their life. We have those kids and parents who always want everything in the musical programs at school but they never help with Band Boosters. We have programs at church. Whatever that program might be people are saying there should be more people helping here and I want to ask, "Have you pitched in?" We are getting ready for a Peach Festival in a few weeks. If you have not signed up to help it's a good chance. There are things all week long in every organization and even at work and the question is: Have you decided to sacrifice some of your personal time that you can give to make everybody else's time a little nicer. When we all chip in with something isn't it amazing how quickly things get done?

The thing that Jesus wants us to chip in most with is bringing his Kingdom. He makes us become fishers of men that we sacrifice some of who we are, some of what we have of our material life and our time life and some of the things that we want to do in life to put God No. 1 that we will bring his Kingdom to its fullness. That any space that might be empty in this church or any other church we will find someone out there that is looking for a savior and introduce them and bring them to this Kingdom. That's something fairly foreign to most of us.

God is not asking most of us to go to the cross. Actually I've never heard that call at all in my life and I'm thankful because it doesn't look like a good thing. He's asking to live for him, not necessarily to die for him although some are called even for that. Are you willing to live for Jesus Christ so wherever you go in your work place people will know who you belong to and that you are a child of God? They see that in the way you treat them. They see that in your speech, they hear it in your words. They see it in your actions. Are you willing and ready to be a living sacrifice.

Along with sacrifice comes the word surrender. That is even a more difficult word. That's like throwing up our arms and saying Lord, everything I have is yours. I am totally acceptable. I am available.

I don't know what made Horatio Spafford and his wife go and form the American Colony in Jerusalem but something moved in his heart through all those experiences of loss. Not everyone is called to that and hopefully they heard it together with their families and they said, "We're going to go and spread this good news about God."

Where is God inviting you to spread good news? Is it to your children and grandchildren? Is it to coworkers and people around this community? What will it mean for you to surrender some of who you are and some of what you have in order to bring the Kingdom of God in its fullness?

Jesus invites us, as he continued in another passage of Scripture, to remind the disciples in order to follow him not only must you surrender and you must consider that word of being a living sacrifice.



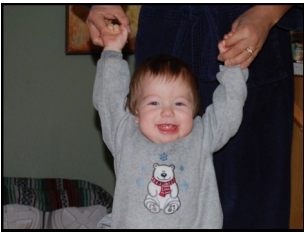


We are called to be fishers of men. If I've made the choice for Jesus Christ I'm called to be out there. One of the problems of the church today is that we stop being fishers of men but we are keepers of the aquarium. Have you ever had an aquarium? I've done that. The aquarium is great until the fish start dying out and all of a sudden you have an empty aquarium. That could happen here at Calvary. We aren't called us to keep us comfortable, keep us cozy, and just to feed us and take care of us. We are called to do that but we are called to so much more. We are called to be fishers of God's children wherever they might be found—to love with open hearts and grace.

The question is asked: What is God calling me to do? God never asked me to go to Jerusalem to do what the Spafford family did. God doesn't call many people to leave their home areas and go elsewhere. Some are called. Sometimes people ask me why do you go on these missions, why do you go to Africa, why do you go here or there. I really feel for me that I am called to do that. I never in my life intended to be a pastor. I wanted to be a contractor. God called me to be here so you are stuck with me. God calls us. He doesn't call everybody to be the same thing. But beyond being called I also have a sense in my mind that when I go to those places I am making a difference. Am I making a difference in their houses and the things we paint and repair? Those things are minor. In another ten years the house need painted and the roof might leak again. But I hope I make an eternal difference that someone can see the Living Lord in me and the team members we take that somebody might say, I want to be a part of that journey to Zion. Those words we don't think of we are marching. We are on a journey and someday whether it's on the streets of pearls or whether I'm going to a mansion on the hilltop (if you know that song), I know I'm going home to God. I would like to think when I get there I'm going to see you and everyone else's lives that I've touched that said isn't it great to be a part of the family of God because we are on this journey together.

God called me. God sends me. I think God also expects us to listen to our call. I don't know what God is calling you to do. My question is: Have your asked? Have you asked the Father in Heaven what he would expect of you? I never cease to be amazed that God calls people to do things at any age of their lives even into the 70's,

80's and 90's and even beyond. People think they've done their job in Bible School, I've done my job helping with children, I'm retiring. There is no retirement from the Kingdom of Heaven. God needs all of us to be his servants as long as we have breath. And as long as we have breath we are expected to be the fisher people who will go out there and fill this aquarium who will want to know more about God. It's a journey that says, I never have enough. I am hungry for the word of God that will take me further and further.



It starts with a journey. Some of you have experienced the feeling of holding your little one up and watching those first steps. Is that a look of pure glee or what? Look at me I'm walking. For most of us when we chose Christ it's a short start. We take a few steps and then we fall. When you fall the way that child falls he picks himself right back up again and you are right there as a mother or father or grandparent to help. We are family and we can be a child of God and an immature child of God when we are eighty if we have just started that journey. Others, look around you, are here to say I will help. I will help you on this path of becoming a Christian and become Christ-like—not only become a follower but become a faithful disciple because I'm on that journey with you.

When we stay on that journey long enough we are a part of a race. The Apostle Paul says it something like this in Hebrews: I've run the race, I've fought the good fight and now there is for me a crown of righteousness laid up in the Kingdom of Heaven. Can you imagine the Olympic Flame? We have a victory. We are called home. We've been faithful and God says, "Welcome home good and faithful friends. I have a place for you and you have left a mark in this kingdom that other people will know the Savior, Jesus Christ."

If we have made that choice, you have to now ask that question, what now? What is expected of me as a follower of the Lord, Jesus Christ?

I hope you will sort that out and I would invite you to come to Pastor Ron or myself or any of our staff and say, you know what, I've been praying about this and this is what I think God wants me to do. See if we can help you do what God is calling you to do.