

Hudson Church Epistle

Monday, January 11, 2021

Hello Church!

And how are those new habits or SMART goals going? In the world of behavioral research, this week is notoriously famous for being the week where we give up on our resolutions.

Right now, I am imitating Darci by using post-it notes for prayer, a new habit that I am adapting to fit with things I do “most every day.” There are now post-it notes on the bulletin board directly behind my laptop screen, where I can pause to pray before I write “most every day.” So far, I am praying more often for those needs than when I simply recorded them in my notebook of ongoing notes, a tool I use for memory and not to be confused with Darci’s practice of morning pages.

Today, I am not focusing on prayer but instead returning to the habit of study, inviting you to look at the Scripture beyond those we chose to use in worship. Every week there are four Scripture passages that can be used for Sunday’s sermon in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). This week the passages from 1 Samuel and 1 Corinthians are already selected. We use the psalm of the week for our Zoom prayer gatherings, so that leaves the week’s Gospel lesson from John 1 for us to ponder together in today’s and Thursday’s epistles.

This year, the RCL draws from both Mark’s gospel and John’s. This reflects a mid-twentieth century point of view that Mark needs John to fill in gaps in Christ’s biography. Recently I joined an online lectionary group where some feel both Mark and John deserve their own year, and I agree. But we also have an active worship team who shares planning with me, and so this year we will stay with the RCL as it now is.

Combining readings from Mark and John has already made worship planning a wee challenge as we consider our primary listeners’ learning needs. The gospel readings for both January 17 and January 24 are both about Jesus calling disciples. It is not seeker friendly to preach one call story from John one week and another call story from Mark the next week. One never knows who will be following our worship online or on the River Channel, so it is wisest to follow St. Augustine’s example and remember that sermons in public worship must consider the learning needs of beginners and seekers.

There are always choices to be made as we walk with Christ. In this week's reading from John 1:43-51 has Jesus making a choice; Philip making a choice; and Nathaniel making a choice. Their choices come as part of a larger sequence.

Jesus had just been baptized by John and was beginning his public ministry. When Jesus first arrived for his baptism, his cousin John the Baptist greeted him saying "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) The next day, Jesus was spotted by some witnesses of his baptism who said "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36) With his public identity established, Jesus began to seek disciples—a small group committed to learning to follow his way.

The notes in *The Wesley Study Bible* points out this chain of call began with Jesus' baptism by John. Next, Jesus called Andrew and Simon Peter from among those who were listening to John the Baptist. Then they met Philip who was so impressed with Jesus that he went to find Nathanael to tell him the Christ promised by Moses and the prophets had arrived! Nathanael was the first person in the chain that began to voice cynicism or doubt. As Jesus greeted him with recognition of his reputation, Nathanael said "Where did you get to know me?" (John 1:48)

Because I have two days to write about this passage, for right now let us pause. Who in this sequence do you identify with? Is it John the Baptist? Perhaps Andrew or Simon Peter who say nothing (yet) but choose to leave John the Baptist and go with Jesus? Do you have the enthusiasm of Philip, desiring to share your faith with your friend? Or do you have the skepticism of Nathanael, wondering how it is that Jesus knows all about you before you know him at all?

It is important not to rush to conclusions. Slowing down to identify with a person who walked with Jesus will give you a handle on this year's reading of the discipleship passages. Take time to research the person that you identify with today. Where did their life go after they made this choice to walk with Jesus? These men were among those who witnessed the feeding of multitudes, the raising of the dead, of a trial and crucifixion, and finally the risen Christ showing up in time for dinner on the first Resurrection Day.

For example, for Thursday I will do Nathanael. My first step will be an internet search "Nathanael, disciple of Jesus" just to distinguish him from other historical figures named Nathanael. You could join me, or you might decide to start with Andrew—the first disciple to say yes to Jesus in John's gospel. Have fun with this!

And one more thing, as you begin researching pause to pray. Dr. Henry Bannister was the first professor of Old Testament at Garrett where both Deacon

Susan and I studied. Francis E. Willard, one of his students, in her biography of great Evanstonians (such as John Evans, the first governor of Colorado) noted that Bannister began his daily work as a scholar by thanking God for the privilege of study and for the blessing of having the ability to do this work. Generations of Methodist preachers have followed his example, and we would love to have you join us in that kind of prayer.

May grace abound as you dig into learning about God's word!

Rev. Dawn