

“Inviting”

Matthew 4.12-22

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There is a saying common to the mission of preachers and journalists: We are to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. And I hope that in today’s sermon, there will be moments of comfort and moments when you will sense challenge ...if not affliction.

We hear about the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry today: he has already been a follower of John and been baptized by him in the Jordan; he has returned from 40 days in the wilderness being tested by the evil one, and now it is his turn to launch his own message and program. (Dare I say that it was Jesus’ inaugural agenda?)

One of the first thing Jesus proclaims employs one of my least favorite words in the English translation of the Bible. It’s a word that you would likely hear on the lips of Jimmy Swaggart or other televangelists: REPENT!

Now, while I have all kinds of negative associations with that English word (and perhaps some of you do, too), the word used in the Greek New Testament is one of my favorites. It is the same

word translated as REPENT, but it has different connotations and shades of meaning. The Greek word is *metanoia* — *meta* (as in metamorphosis) means to change, and *nous/noia* has to do with your way of thinking and being (as in paranoia...well, bad example, but you get the picture).

Metanoia means to bring about a radical shift – a transformation — which is absolutely central to vital, living Christianity. It's kind of a heart-and-mind transplant, as Paul wrote, “Let the same mind (*nous/noia*) be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”¹

You all remember Plymouth's mission statement: “It is our mission to worship God and to help make God's realm visible in the lives of people individually and collectively.” We do this by “inviting, transforming, and sending.”

That second step — transforming — is what *metanoia* is all about. We have to be willing to shift our thinking and our way of living to transform ourselves when our faith demands it. We need to be able to part with some of our old, comfortable patterns and live into new ways of being and doing.

Why? Why do we need to transform ourselves if we're already doing pretty well and we're at least okay, flawed people? Jesus tells us the WHY of transformation: BECAUSE God's realm or

¹ Phil. 2.5

kingdom has come near. (Jesus goes even further in Luke's gospel, saying that the kingdom of God is not simply NEAR...it's HERE...among us!)

This kingdom is not like the empires of *this* world, which seek power over, domination of the many by the few, winner take all, and privilege for the elite. In the coming weeks, through his Sermon on the Mount, you will hear Jesus tell what the kingdom is all about: hungering for justice and righteousness, blessing the poor, and working to become peacemakers.

Wait a minute... the poor? ... working for justice? ... peacemaking? That may not be the priority (or the rhetoric) of the new administration, but is it God's priority. It isn't about Republicans or Democrats...it's far more basic than that. On a fundamental level, it's not about what is advantageous to any one of us, but rather what is congruent with the teachings of Jesus...the historical Jesus....the human being who was born, grew up, taught, led, prayed, and was executed in the first century.

It is a lot easier for any one of us to know what Jesus said than it is for us to DO what Jesus DID...and both are integral to the Christian journey. None of us gets it right, but what we are about in the church is to work toward that goal — to aim toward God's realm and to be God's co-creators of it.

I have been told recently by some of our members that it feels so good to be with folks at Plymouth. And I think part of that is that we attempt to live by love for one another...we don't always make it, but we try together. And that isn't something you necessarily find in other organizations, whether in justice work, nonprofit work, schools, or some churches. The UCC's tagline speaks volumes: "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here."

Democrats and Republicans and Independents: ALL WELCOME HERE! Gay, straight, bi, lesbian, questioning...ALL WELCOME HERE! Male, female, trans...ALL WELCOME HERE! Old, young, in between...ALL WELCOME HERE! Introverted and extroverted; Republican, Democrat, and Independent; physical and cerebral; able-bodied and people with disabilities; doubters and believers; black, white and all shades in between...ALL WELCOME HERE!

And the issue is that there are people in Fort Collins...right there at CSU...who have no idea that a church like Plymouth even exists. Lots of folks don't know that a congregation that actively welcomes spiritual exploration in community can be found right here. After all, our name sounds like other churches...our building looks like other churches...how on earth can they be expected to know that we are different? progressive? welcoming? wondering?

Let me show you a 90-second video released last week by the UCC... can you imagine any other denomination doing *this?* [VIDEO]

Jesus has called YOU from your nets to become fishers of women and men — even if that seems scary to you. It's time to shift our way of thinking and acting on this, because our community...our nation...God's world needs to have the gift of Plymouth spread wider. So, summon up the courage to invite someone to Plymouth...it is not going to happen automatically without your participation, and "somebody else" at Plymouth is not going to do it for you.

For many of us, this is the challenging part: We need to be open to transforming our hearts and minds — to be open to *metanoia* — if we are going to do this. We have to leave some of our reticence, our shyness, our pride at the doorstep if we want to share the gift of progressive faith at Plymouth. You clergy cannot do this alone.

We have a gift to share — we are a challenging, talented, motivated group of people who want to explore their faith, and we have a God whose steadfast love for humanity is palpable. We are a congregation where you can bring your heart and your mind to church, where we work together for justice, peace, and the

integrity of creation — not as an add-on program, but as an essential part of our ministry and mission.

So, I challenge you, each of you, to think about the gift of Plymouth (whether its education or fellowship or worship or justice work). Think about it...maybe even be grateful for it! And then invite a friend, coworker, or neighbor who might appreciate you sharing that gift. It's an invitation...but it could be one that makes a world of difference in someone's life.

Now, more than ever, the role of the progressive church is critical. Our witness is essential, our fellowship is sustaining, our worship challenges us and builds us up.

Jesus challenges each of us to leave behind “business as usual,” whether that is fishing nets or the routine of your life today. He has called you to be fishers of women and men.

Amen.