

Perry FUMC - 23 Jan. 2011

Mt. 4:12-23

"Call to Discipleship: Building a Cottage of Straw and Mud"

I suspect Peter and Andrew,
James and John
had heard of Jesus of Nazareth
before he came around
knocking on their boats.
They had a life,
they had jobs
and families
and a way to get by in their day and time.
But we know it wasn't a *just* life—
a life of equality for all —
and I suspect that what they had heard
about this man who had come to their town
gave them hope
for a better life,
a more just life,
for their families and neighbors.
And so when Jesus comes to them
and interrupts their lives,
they drop everything,
and follow.

Their lives will never be the same.

I suspect they had no idea
what they were getting themselves into.
They had hoped for a better way.
Turns out,
the call to live the way Jesus lived and taught and preached
is to begin life anew.
It is to begin to observe and learn how to live

God's Way —

the way of unity and dependence on one another
and all of creation.

We're still learning.

Do you remember moments
when Jesus walked up to your boat
and invited you to follow him?

The moments when you were
upset enough,
angry enough,
desperate enough

to say to God,
okay—I'll try it your way now.

I'll forget about what other people will think.

I'll leave my father sitting in the boat with the nets
all by himself.

I'll forget about me doing this my way, on my own
with me in control.

I'll forget about what everybody else says I should do;
is the right thing to do.

I'll leave my boat
and follow you
and your crazy-loving,
counter-culture way.

One of those moments for me—
those follow-Jesus moments—
was during my last semester at seminary,
when I took a course called
"The New Cosmology and Christian Nurture."

Those were the months,

a beautiful spring,
when a most knowledgeable woman
following *God's Way*

taught me that God has been creating this amazing and wondrous and
miraculous universe

for 13.7 billion years,
and that humans didn't come along until one minute before midnight on the
geological clock;
that the universe had existed for 13 billion years
before we humans came along.
This was a shocking realization:
God began creating a universe
and left us out of it for all that, inconceivable, time?
God didn't create the universe
for us humans?!
This new understanding rocked me to the core.
Mine slowly became a whole new life after that.
I began to see that trashing the planet—
this miraculous place that God created—
must be an insult to God.
I began to imagine God's pain
at seeing many of the diverse species of God's good creation disappear
completely;
miles and miles of ocean deadened by the trash swirling in it;
the air filling with poisons.
My life would never be the same.
I began changing light bulbs
and carrying my own bags into grocery stores,
(rocking the world of checkout clerks,)
throwing out chemical household cleaners
and using vinegar instead,
burying my kitchen scraps in the backyard,
joining the Oklahoma Food Coop and buying food
that is raised within 100 miles and is fresh and grown without chemicals that
destroy the soil, the air and make people sick;
eating only meat that is raised humanely.
My life would never be the same.
My sister and I, who had begun to hold retreats
at our family farm,
started noticing this marvelous planet:
paying attention to the miniscule—
the way soil clumps together, or doesn't;
the life of honeybees;

the exquisite beauty of a dragonfly.

We paid attention to the grand as well—

stepping outside each evening to watch Earth roll up again

and the sun disappear, leaving an orange, red, pink, gold and purple sky;

stepping outside every night to take in a blackened sky filled with jillions of bright stars and a swathe of white;

standing in awe of the subtle and sublime lines of the prairie as it rises and meets the sky on the horizon.

The more we paid attention,

the more we realized we had to start living differently—

living in a way that was healthy for God's good creation,
on which we depend for life.

We started collecting our shower water into buckets and jugs and using it to fill the tank of the toilet after we flushed it.

We started raising bees, as our father had,
and chickens for eggs

and alpacas, for their manure for our gardens—
and for their good company.

We started raising Red Wiggler Worms
to eat our kitchen scraps
and produce compost for our gardens.

We built composters to make more compost.

Eventually we started raising rabbits—
for their good company,
but also for their manure
to feed the Red Wiggler Worms.

And if you think that's all crazy,
when we needed some private space
for the people who come to retreats
at Turtle Rock Farm,

we decided to build a house of straw!

That's when our neighbors asked us:

"Haven't you heard of the three little pigs?!"

They thought we'd gone completely nuts.

"What are those girls up to now?"

was the word on the street.

Yup,

they're building a little house

out of the straw bales from their wheat harvest
and they're covering the walls with mud—
from clay right out front there where they dug it up.

As we proceeded with our cock-eyed,
boat-knocking
plans,

we began to learn
that we're not the only ones.

In fact, we were catching on pretty late.

There was an entire organization
in Oklahoma—the Oklahoma Sustainability Network—
a network of people all across the state living sustainably
and supporting each other as they live in ways
that encourage the health of creation.

We joined that network
and the work of learning together.

We realized we not only needed to grow more of our own vegetables and
fruits—as our parents had—
but teach others how they could grow their own food,
even in small city spaces.

And we began to teach others other ways of living more sustainably—
with God and each other and all of creation on this marvelous living organism
of a planet.

When it came time to build a cottage for our guests,
it was obvious that we would learn how to build sustainably.

And we discovered people who knew how to do that.

Tom Temple,

a sustainable builder in Oklahoma City,
designed a cottage with sustainable systems—

an on-demand hot water heater,

a composting toilet,

passive solar placement of windows,

a gray water system—without buckets and jugs.

He introduced us to Steve Kemble and Mollie Curry

from North Carolina,

who had been teaching people how to build strawbale structures for more
than 20 years.

We scheduled them to come to Turtle Rock Farm
for a week last June.

Twenty Oklahomans and Kansans signed up
to come for that week and learn how to build a strawbale house.
They all had been interested in natural construction for a long time,
and most want to build their own strawbale houses someday.
We spent a week together
placing the straw bales
and mudding the walls.

SHOW SLIDES:

1 "Bales to the Hermitage"

2 "Securing the bales"

3 Straw walls halfway"

4 "Mud pit"

5 "Chinking north wall"

6 "Group on north wall"

That week was a watershed experience—
an aren't-you-glad-you-left-your-boat-and-followed-me?-
experience.

Not only did we learn how to use the wheat off our fields
and the soil from our pasture to build a house,
we learned about community-building.

SHOW SLIDE:

7 "Supper first day"

We learned about *God's Way*,
of unity and interdependence.

Jesus had come to our boat
and said follow me
and here we were,
a new community
working together
to create something from the good Earth
that is healthy for all.

The first morning,
we stood under the metal roof

in a circle
and blessed our time together,
our work
and the building itself.

(SHOW SLIDE: 8 "Blessing Circle")

Every morning we sat in a circle
to reflect on how we had been touched
in our work together the day before.

(SHOW SLIDE: 9 "Morning Circle")

Mid-week, after the strawbales had been put in place,
trimmed and sculpted,
and just before we began to chink the seams
with cob mud,
we paused and wrote prayers on wood shims
then stuffed them in the straw walls,
for all who would eventually enter the hermitage.

(SHOW SLIDE: 10 "Prayer")

It took us the next six months to finish
the layers of mud covering the walls.
We still have three outside walls to
finish when winter is over
and the chance of freezing temperatures
has passed.

Some of our community from June returned—
some again and again—
to mud the walls.

And lots of other volunteers came—
some friends,
some people we'd never met before;
people of all ages—from 90-year-olds
to four-year-olds.

(SHOW SLIDE: 11 "Tulsa kids mudding")

12 "Beth, Ann, Debra Karen - mudding")

Their tiny and their worn hands
helped add to the warmth and stability
of a house that is now a place
for people to come,
pay attention to God's good creation

and be restored.

Our neighbors still think we're nuts,
though, when they visit,
they are surprised at how sturdy,
how warm in the winter and cool in the summer,
and how lovely is our house of straw and mud.
Our guests... well, our guests
say they can feel the prayers in the walls
and the prayers of the good Earth
around them.

(SHOW SLIDES:

- 13 "Hermitage in the snow"
- 14 "Southside hermitage"
- 15 "hermitage with furniture"
- 16 "Retreatant in windowseat")

Our work at Turtle Rock Farm
continues
and expands and deepens.
It is not easy work
but it is deeply satisfying
because we know
it is the work we've been asked to do.
We remember the times Jesus
came knocking on our boats.
It is the work
of *God's* way -
work that contributes to health and life for all,
and recognizes the unity and interdependence
of *God's* beautiful universe.
(big pause)

I think of Mr. Zebedee
sitting there in the boat with the nets
after his sons had walked off,
following some stranger.

I wonder if he thought *they* were nuts.

I wonder if all the upset
caused by their following Jesus
eventually resulted in a better life for him.

I can imagine that the hope
that his sons brought home

had little to do with making their life any *easier*.

But I imagine that the hope they brought home,

the hope they lived in

knowing and following Jesus,

was the kind of hope

that could change the world—

that could show us that we must recognize

our unity with

and dependence upon

God,

each other

and all of creation;

the kind of hope we feel,

each time

we stand in awe of a starlit sky

or gather in community

and make a small strawbale hermitage.

(SHOW SLIDE: 17 "Group shot north wall")

Thanks be to God.

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