

“Really?”
Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm 138
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 5:1-11

Put one foot in front of the other to press on, to press forward, to do what needs to be done. You can live your life out of a place of love. Jesus has given us the grace we need to keep putting one foot in front of the other. In Christ, we can do what needs to be done. Loving God. Loving others. Making Disciples. And we can do all that needs to be done in words and deeds of love, generosity, and inclusion.

To live a life of words and deeds in love, generosity, and inclusion, we need a personal encounter with God and one that is ongoing. Believing is important, but unless beliefs transform us, beliefs are useless. In Jesus Christ, we are a new creation. A personal encounter with God leads us to participate with God in God’s mission. In all four texts, Isaiah, Psalms, 1 Corinthians, and Luke, a personal encounter with God leads one to missional engagement and intergenerational participation in love, generosity, and inclusion.

William Carey had an ongoing personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Early on in his ministry, as an ordained Baptist minister in the late 18th century, Carey was at a gathering of ministers for a theological forum on a variety of issues. One of the senior ministers asked Carey for a theme to discuss to which Carey replied, “May we consider whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not obligatory on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world, seeing that the accompanying promise was of equal extent.” Dr. Ryland promptly denounced Carey, “Sit down young man! When God chooses to convert the heathen, he will do it

without your aid or mine!”¹ You recall the Great Commission, which is the other bookend of the Great Commandment, states, “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. **And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” Command, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,**” and promise, “**And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

Simon Peter, like William Carey, had an ongoing personal encounter with Jesus. The story in Luke is set in the early days of Jesus’ ministry. After a day’s activity, Jesus paused at the lake of Gennesaret. Simon Peter, James, John, and other fishermen had just returned from fishing all-night having caught no fish. The text intimates that Jesus was some distance away and a crowd had gathered around him to hear him teach. Jesus seized the moment to use a real-life situation to teach the disciples and crowd about his identity. Shortly after Jesus and the crowd meandered over to Simon Peter and his partners, Jesus got into the boat and told Simon Peter to go out a way from the shore into deep water and cast his nets for a catch. Simon Peter did as Jesus asked, and the text tells us that they caught so many fish their nets began to break. Simon Peter called to shore for his partners to come out and fill their boats. He had been a fisherman for years. Simon Peter knew his trade. But now, with his boats full to overflowing, he had a crisis of faith. Simon Peter didn’t believe that Jesus could get a catch of fish any more than he could. Simon Peter’s sin was his disbelief.

William Carey did not “sit down.” William Carey “stood up and stepped out” and founded the Missionary Society to India. Transformation occurs in everyday life situations

¹Taken from “Missionary Lessons from Dr. Carey” by Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr., a sermon preached on Lord’s Day Evening, February 19, 2006, at the Baptist Tabernacle of Los Angeles.

through believing. Obeying Jesus and his Word moves us out of a self-preoccupied perspective and experience of a relationship with God to a self-giving, authentic, and transformational perspective and experience. Yes, words and deeds begin to match the behavior of Jesus. As Gradye Parsons reminds us in *Our Connectional Church*, showing up is more than half the battle for experiencing transformation when he writes, “Showing up may not seem like a large accomplishment, but it is. As the saying goes, 90% of life is showing up. The people of [Shady Grove Presbyterian Church] didn’t just show up at church, they showed up outside the four walls of the building where many people have negative views of a church they see as too judgmental. So, we have to overcome that perception by revealing a different picture of the church.”²

Isaiah 6:3 reads, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” Psalm 138:8 reads, “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.” 1 Corinthians 15:10 reads, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.” And Luke 5:10 reads, “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’” God’s holiness is everywhere. God will fulfill God’s purpose in your life. God’s grace is your life blood. Do not fear living in word and deed the life of Jesus.

Are you willing to participate in the missional and intergenerational life of Geneva? If so, be loving, generous, and inclusive in your words and deeds. Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord, and the Transfiguration of Jesus remind us that Jesus Christ has come for everyone. We are God’s agent, individually and as a community of faith, to manifest God’s favor to everybody; Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, Republican and Democrat, vaccinated and unvaccinated, and the religiously hurt, skeptical, and unbelieving in the world. Really? You are

²Gradye Parsons, *Our Connectional Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 32.

needed. Each of us must find our one way to serve in God’s mission. And service is fun when we do it with others, young and old, in authentic relationship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”³ Only a strong sense of a call to follow Jesus and an equally strong sense of purpose can accept the necessary losses that commitment will cost.

My fellow Genevans, all are waiting to experience an honest, engaged, authentic, welcoming, inclusive, and vulnerable Christian in their life. This is the process of making disciples. Yes, really!⁴ Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
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³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 63.

⁴In preparation of this sermon, I have benefited from the thinking of Brent A. Strawn, Stacey Simpson Duke, Rhodora E. Beaton, Mark Abbott, Beth Felker Jones, Warren Carter, and Blair R. Monie in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 223-225, 225-227, 228-230, 231-233, 233-234, 235-237, and 237-238.