

First Presbyterian Church
“On the Road Again: Companions”
Rev. Dr. John Judson
February 6, 2022

Ezra 5:1-2; Luke 5:1-11

It was the table of misfit boys. That is how I have come to think about my lunch table in high school. I don't know about you, but in my high school cafeteria, there were territories staked out by various groups of students. There was the jock section where all the athletes sat. There was the Belle's section where the drum and bugle core members sat. There was the cheerleader section, and the academically gifted section. The Jesus kids sat outside in the shade of a hallway, which was possible most of the year because this was Houston after all. The stoners sat out by a baseball backstop. The auto shop guys ate in the shop. The smokers ate in the smoking area...yes, there was a smoking area. Then there was the table of misfit boys. This was a table off by itself...not sure how or why it was there...but my friends and I claimed it. Though some of us were jocks, or auto shop, or some Jesus people...not me by the way...none of us really fit in. So, we ate, laughed, played Oreo hockey and built relationships across the high school divide. For some reason the cafeteria people didn't like our wayward table and so they removed it. We just found chairs and sat where it had been until they returned it. I have been thinking about that table of misfit boys a lot this week because it seems as if that is what Jesus was trying to create in the calling of his disciples.

I say that Jesus was creating a table of misfit boys...and yes there were female disciples who were essential to Jesus' mission...but as the narrative is often told there were twelve guys that Jesus called to be his disciples. And any way you slice it, they were a bunch of misfits. You have Peter who though he says he gets it, about who Jesus is, but he never really does. You have others who are enemy tax-collectors. You have others who are known as the Sons of Thunder because evidently, they had horrible tempers. You had one who was greedy and stealing from the company's stash of cash...and who would ultimately betray Jesus. You had others who were fishermen with no formal religious training who did not really fit into Jerusalem society. And speaking of Jerusalem society, all these men were from Galilee, which meant they had accents and were seen as uneducated, rebellious rubes. And as we all know, all of those at the table of misfit boys would run away and hide when Jesus was arrested...though not the women. So why in the world would Jesus call these people? Surely there was a first century disciple recruiter that would screen applicants. But know these were the ones Jesus chose.

Why? I believe he was calling them because he was creating a community of misfit companions. I offer you three brief reasons as to why Jesus called these men and women. First, Jesus had come to create a community that was to be the provisional demonstration of the Kingdom of God on earth. I understand that for many of us, we have been taught that Jesus came to build a stairway to heaven. That earth is merely a testing and training ground to see if we get beamed up after our lives are over. Those understandings, my friends, are not Biblical. They are the invention of an after-life focused Christianity. This book (the Bible) tells us that God cares as much, if not more about earth than heaven. This physical world is God's amazing

creation and God's plan is to redeem it and everyone in it. And to accomplish this redemption, God's plan is to create a community through whom this restoration can happen.

Second, Jesus is creating a community of misfits. I understand that some of you may find this label to be a bit insulting. Few of us want to be seen as misfits. But consider the word. It means to not fit in, or to not be a fit for something. What Jesus was creating was a community of persons that did not fit comfortably into the surrounding culture. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he told people not to leave the culture, but not to be molded into its shape. This community of misfits are to be those persons shaped by the Spirit; shaped to love rather than hate, to forgive rather than get even, to welcome rather than exclude, to accept rather than reject, to show compassion rather than indifference, to speak the truth rather than hide behind lies, and to share what they have rather than simply spend on self. In other words, we are not to fit comfortably into a culture that does not value every human being as a unique creation of God and treat them as such.

Third, this community needed to be a community of companions. There are plenty of times large groups gather: rock concerts, political rallies, and the like. And while the people at these events may see themselves as a community because they share similar tastes in music or politics, they are not the kind of community Jesus is creating. Jesus is creating a community in which people know one another, pray for one another, share with one another, and care for and about one another. They are to be a people who eat, laugh, love, study, and share their lives together. This is what companions are. They are those on whom we can depend when things get difficult. They are those who will accept us as we are and help us become more than we are. They are those who will love us regardless. This is what companions are.

To be perfectly honest I would not have made it through high school without my table of misfit boys. They carried me through broken relationships, academic struggles, taught me how to rebuild engines, welcomed me when I quit the football team, and put up with and supported me in my times of depression and anger. They were a community of companions that I believe God called me into. So, what I want to say this morning is this: we are a community of companions called by Jesus Christ. All of you here, all of you watching at home, all of you watching this later, you are part of us, and we are part of you. We are here to listen to you, to pray for you, to encourage you, and to care about you. Will we do these things perfectly? No. But we will try because we are part of Jesus' table of misfit people.

My challenge to you for this week is this, to ask yourselves, how am I being a companion to someone else, in the name of Jesus who has called me to be his own?