

Sermon - Aug. 30, 2009

And Nahum Would Have Said – Will You God's Followers Be?

Matthew 4:18-25, 28:16-20 Acts 2:29-42

The plan for this Sunday was for me to preach from another of the so-called Minor Prophets – those short but powerful books of the Old Testament with major time less messages for God's people. We've shared this summer messages from Hosea and Habbakuk and Micah – and next week Malachi...

And this week Nahum was to have been the focus.... And then – in part while I was away, some good thinking was done by the staff, I should say, more good thinking – because you are served by some remarkably able people - And together it became apparent to us that we needed to begin to talk together about Akaloo - and so we will? In light of God's word to us this morning, we will talk a bit about what this word – Akaloo - this word for a new program for our Church this fall – means. Can you... Akaloo?

The word - a form of a Greek word - means – to follow. And Akaloo is a new and special call – though our Church, for us all to listen more carefully than ever to what God is calling us to be and to do – as followers of Christ. In this difficult time - with so many challenging things happening in our lives, in every difficult time – God is never far off, is always near, and is, or can be, our comfort and our strength. If.... If we choose to Akaloo...

Nahum, the prophet, lived in the 7th. Century BC - 600 years before Jesus came. And Nahum spoke very angry words of judgement against God's people for not acting like God's people at all. Israel has become a nation often at war, and a people filled with greed, consumed by their intense concern with getting and spending. And Nahum saw a coming judgement upon God's people – they were – in a way – digging their own graves. And he sought to warn them;

It is a short book - but a little painful to read – because it sounds as if God were speaking to us. And maybe Nahum does have an important message for us. I encourage you to read it. Because – even in his anger at the foolish sinfulness of God's people – Nahum seems really to be saying – what God is always trying to say to God's people - follow me. The prophet said -

The Lord is Good – a strong hold in a day of trouble. He protects those who take refuge in him. Follow me. Akaloo. Please pray with me.

Lord – trouble all around us. Earthquake, Hurricanes, floods and fire – two wars we're in – or is it more. Leaders in business who have failed us – and we ourselves do not live according to your way for us in Christ ... Still, Lord, your word calls us to seek your forgiveness and to obey your call to love you with all our heart, and mind and soul and strength – and our neighbors as ourselves. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of these your faithful people to be a call to us this day to deeper faith. Amen.

Come, follow me. Akaloo. That's all he said. And immediately they followed him - Simon and his brother Andrew. And he saw, and called, two more.

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Akaloo – follow me. And James and John did. And so it began. And has not yet ended. The work of God among us – calling God's people, through Jesus Christ, to be God's people and to proclaim in word and deed God's love – until - as the Apostle Paul wrote – every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Akaloo – come, Follow.

And – in many ways – we have. It's why we are here. We've heard - we've felt God's presence in our lives – and we've chosen to be Christians – followers of Christ. And- as it happens here – every year - the season of Fall is a time for us to renew for ourselves – that call of God in Christ.

Summer slips away – and hopefully – having had some extra time to enjoy the wonders of God's creation all around us - we are, and will be, picking up the pace a bit in our lives, and, in our lives of faith. We will be ready to explore in some new ways God's call to us to be God's people... we will be ready to learn a bit more about how God can be found present in our lives. A ready source of strength and comfort. And – to see new ways in which we can live more holy, more Christ-like – and so - happier lives.

And its all about – yes - Akaloo - about how we follow Jesus. John Oxenham, the poet, put it this way...Its -Not what, but Whom, I do believe... that, in my darkest hour of need hath comfort that no mortal creature to mortal man may give; Not what, but whom! For Christ is more than all the creeds, and his full life of gentle deeds shall all the creeds outlive. Not what I do believe, but whom! Who walks beside me in the gloom. Who shares the burden worrisome? Who all the dim way doth illumine, and bids me look beyond the tomb, the larger life to live. Not what I do believe, but whom.

For Oxenham, for us, it isn't what we believe – what we believe about evolution or creationism, about baptizing by sprinkling or splashing, about divorce or abortion or sexuality, about organs or guitars -For Oxenham, for us, for the Christ who, by the living Spirit, calls us - faith is not first or foremost about what we believe, but whom, whom we believe in.

Akaloo – who we choose to follow. It's – All about Jesus.

Those first disciples, that handful of followers, heard him call, that was all. Heard him call – and they followed. For them, Jesus wasn't just an important commitment, Jesus wasn't just valued - He was valued above all else. As they followed him, and learned from him ...

Everything in their lives would finally be measured against what he had taught them. And - nothing has changed when it comes to the basic truth about what it means to be a Christian. For all the confusion there can be about what it means to be a Christian, what it is Jesus would have us do about – for example - marriage, or health care for the least and last and lost in life - or the growing gap between rich and poor in America...

For all the debate on these and other issues... The core issue – the critical question for us - every new day – is not what we believe in - but in whom we believe. Not what – but who is Lord and Savior.... It's why we are, after all, called Christians. Little Christs. And the pattern of the Christian life is, yes, at the dawning of every new day we renew our commitment to Christ. This day, Lord, in this day, guide me; lead me, that I may be faithful to your way and truth and love.

Yes – every day, and then, week by week, every Lord's day, every Sunday, again and again we renew the vow – Yes Lord. And as the cycle of the year passes, as time passes, from season to season, we also find ways to help us keep refocusing our faith and our lives. Each fall we pick up the beat again – and move into a new Church year – with special times to help focus our faith - and special events.

For us - the Church education program increases, we kick off a month of mission concern with Reach Out Day – putting our faith to work in the community – we look to Thanksgiving, and Christmas and beyond to Easter – as days and ways to remind us of Christ's constant call for us to live lives of real purpose and meaning and joy.

And this Fall – next month – we are invited to hear God's call, Akaloo – anew. To engage in a new way to follow more clearly more nearly God's way for us to live as Christians. Akaloo - Wednesday Evenings - Something new -something that could be very good for you - all of you - all of us. And it is timely call.

This will be no easy fall – for any of us. It will be a challenging time as our country continues to struggle with terrorism- and the wars against it - Struggle with the pain this recession has caused for so many - Struggle with the need for some kind of major change in our health care system to be sure many more, if not all, can receive care..

And our own struggling as a Church to be faithful in this uncertain time, as we look for the next Pastor, and who that person will be and how that person will guide and inform our faith -help us Akaloo...

It is our hope that this fall – and Akaloo – will help us help each other grow in our faith, in our sense and understanding of God's presence in our lives... Will help each of us – follow Christ more clearly and nearly. And the task of answering God's call in Christ is challenging...

The new life we have in Christ does not free us from struggle; struggle with doubt, and with pride and lust and fear. We still struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems every day.

But with our decision to follow Christ each new day, and with the care and support of those with whom we share this decision, in the Church, we can live lives ever more pleasing to God, and more pleasing and joyful for us. This is God's call, God's promise. Over and over again, in many ways, God calls.

God seeks to be that still small voice ringing in our ears, the presence we feel like a wind lifting us up. You shall be my witnesses Lo, I am with you always.

Life is, the Christian life is, not what you and I believe – but who we believe in. Who walks beside me in the gloom, who shares the burden worrisome, who all the dim way doth illumine?

Some years ago a young Olympic athlete, Brian Sternberg, turned the phrase around a bit. He said what mattered most in life was not what he did, but who he was. Olympic Athlete, he suffered a paralyzing injury, and then he wrote about who he really was. Before my accident I was very satisfied with the way I was living - good clean athletic life. Which was and is pretty good in comparison to too many others.

But, he went on to say; now I know that's not enough. After my accident I'm no longer an athlete, but now I am a Christian. I am more now than I ever was before. Now I seek God diligently and strive to be in his will at all times.

It's not enough to be a great athlete – things will tempt you and destroy you – Barry Bonds. It's not enough to be a successful politician – things will tempt you and destroy you - Mayor Kilpatrick. Illness or a bad economy – can and will change our lives - but not how we live them... If ... If we have found one who calls us to follow him and his promise to lead us in the way that leads to the richest fullest life possible - now and forever.

Akaloo. Come. Follow. That's Christ's call, and it's your church's call to you this fall. Come – be a part of this Church family on Wednesday nights – as we seek to help our young people, and ourselves. Respond to God's love.

Come break bread with us – or after – if that's all time permits - and dig more deeply into our faith in God. It's God's call - but only you and I can answer - can step out in faith. Can Christ's follower be?

And so grow in our knowledge of God's love for us, and God's call to us to be ambassadors for Christ, using our gifts in loving service. Akaloo - I heard him call. That's all. Come follow. That's all. Who would not follow if they heard him call?
Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

Good morning -- I'm glad you are here – it is good to see you and be with you.
I wonder – have you ever played the game – Simon Says?
It's a game where you follow instructions- or you lose.

For example - If I say to you – Simon says – raise your right hand. Then, you raise your right hand. But if I say to you – raise your right hand. You don't raise your hand – because I didn't say – Simon says. Let's try it...

Simon says raise your right hand. Simon says – stand up. Sit down. Opps..

You did something that Simon didn't say you should do.

Remember - you only do what Simon says you should do.

Simon says clap your hands. Good.

And – what I want you to remember is that in life - every day – we should try to do only what Jesus says we should do. If Jesus says – raise your hand. We should do it. If Jesus says love your brother or sister... we should do it.

And here is something Jesus does say – Jesus says - pray.

So – let's pray together....

Thank you Jesus for loving us so much – and for helping us know what is the right thing to do....