



“TICK, TICK... BOOM!
Actions Speak Louder Than Words”
Pastor Megan Berry

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“TICK, TICK...BOOM!: Actions Speak Louder Than Words” | Matthew 4:18-22 | Pastor Megan Berry

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus.

Thanks be to God for these words of scripture

Our scripture for today is not one that I super love, it brings up a lot of questions that I often don’t want to wrestle with like “what does it mean to be fishers of people?” or “Am I ALSO supposed to drop everything to follow Jesus?” That sounds... incredibly difficult. If these are questions you have too, know that you’re not alone and we’re going to wrestle with the second one together today.

Something that I think might help us, or at least helps me, is remembering that there are “surface-level” or what I’m going to call “easy” interpretations of scripture and then there are more “metaphorical” or “nuanced” interpretations. Neither are more wrong or right than the other, they are often simply different and bring up different questions or unease. This is a thought experiment that we started doing with the youth near the end of this past program year, and it really helped to tease out some of those “oh my gosh!” level questions and come to an understanding of scripture that felt more holistic.

So, while a surface level interpretation of this passage tells me that I need to drop everything, sell all of my possessions and go follow Jesus and start fishing for people. A more nuanced interpretation might help illuminate how we might already be doing part of this, just in a less drastic fashion than we’ve been presented with in our scripture passage for this morning.

We’re also, of course, going to be doing this alongside our musical for today *tick, tick... BOOM!* by Jonathan Larson. Jonathan is better known for his hit musical *RENT* which ran on Broadway for 12 years; however, *tick, tick... BOOM!* is gaining more of a following now that it’s been made into a hit Netflix movie and was produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The musical is a brief auto-biography of Jonathan’s life as he wrestles with turning 30 and still

has yet to write a successful musical. He's in the midst of a personal identity crisis, trying to find success and prove that his years of being a starving artist weren't for nothing, he wants to be known, not for the fame and ego boost, he wants to be known so he can believe he hasn't wasted his life, his potential, he hasn't been a failure...

Alongside the anxiety of being an adult and finding your way, he's also living amidst the AIDS crisis and is watching his friends die and no one is seemingly doing anything about this crisis and he's unsure what his place is in that either. He's not a scientist or doctor, he's an artist, right?

Song after song, we watch Jonathan struggle to make sense of his priorities. He's trying to write the next big musical AND pay bills AND be a good boyfriend AND be a good friend AND AND AND... it all feels like too much, he's unsure what proverbial plate he can let fall and life will still be okay.

As time keeps tick, tick, ticking by and the plot is thickening, he and his girlfriend Susan have a big fight, he and his best friend Michael have a big fight, he still hasn't found the right song to tie his musical together, everything feels like it's in shambles THEN... he has a breakthrough.

In reflecting on his friendship with Michael, he recognizes that actions speak louder than words. What he remembers fondly aren't the hollow promises to spend more time together, or the wishful "we can do this exciting thing once X Y Z happens in life", it was the true time they made the effort to spend together. It was the intentional moments of life together through musicals and summer camp and roughing it in the starving artist phase that built and maintained these strong bonds of friendship.

Slowly, it became evident that Jonathan's hyper fixation on his musical was at the root of so many of his problems, even though he felt like a successful musical and successful career would fix many of the problems he was feeling and facing, the hyper fixation was becoming a detriment. His actions were showing his friends that they didn't matter as much as success did, even though his words were trying to say otherwise.

So we get to the end of the musical, and everything isn't perfect, but we still get this heartbreakingly beautiful piece of music called "Louder than Words", there is a link to the movie version on YouTube in Connections from Friday. In this song, Jonathan reflects on how our actions speak louder than our words and he poses many questions for his listeners to reflect on that were not only pertinent to his time during the AIDS crisis, but also feel worthy of reflection now.

Questions like

- Why does it take an accident before the truth gets through to us?
- Why should we try our best when we can just get by and still gain?
- How as we travel, can we see the dismay, and keep from fighting?

And these questions kept bringing me back to the various call stories of the disciples and how their actions (in this one particular instance) showed a deep devotion to Jesus and his ways above everything else.

So I started to wonder about the cost of discipleship (and not the book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, although I hear it's an excellent read). We see one particular cost in this scripture that feels quite costly, the disciples literally set down their vocations, their livelihood, their families and follow Jesus. So is that the cost that we should all be paying? To me, that doesn't feel quite right, it feels too easy a solution.

So let's expand our basis a little bit here. We know that being a disciple and practicing discipleship is about following Jesus and especially now, trying to be like Jesus in the world today, to be his hands and feet on the earth.

So outside of come and follow me, what were some of his other commands to the disciples?

- "Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit" Matthew 28
- "Love God and love your neighbor," Matthew 22
- "Pray" Matthew 5
- "Repent" Matthew 4
- "Forgive" Matthew 18
- "Serve/help others" Matthew 25

These are just from the gospel of Matthew!

So, what if our actionable moment is not to drop everything, quit our jobs, sell our possessions, and kiss our families goodbye to be good disciples? Instead, what if it's to take drastic action towards these goals of helping others, forgiving those around us, loving our neighbors?

When Mark Adams writes about this scripture he says, "The Scriptures just say they obeyed Jesus' call. Discipleship is just that: hearing God's call and obeying it – even if it means radical changes of direction in life."

He goes on to say "A danger in the church today is the tendency for us to define our mission and then invite Jesus to tag along with us."

And friends, let me tell you when I read this paragraph I had to pause for a moment and do some deep reflection. "A danger in the church today is the tendency for us to define our mission and then invite Jesus to tag along with us"...

Sometimes I wonder if the church has become like Jonathan, chasing something we think is our mission, chasing something we think we will bring "success" and prove the church was "worthy" and the whole time Jesus is standing off in the corner going "HEY FRIENDS, OVER HERE, LOOK, COME THIS WAY!"

And just like Jonathan, we do it not out of ill-will, not because we're seeking fame or an ego-boost, but because our priorities have gotten a little mixed up. We've let our thinking take over instead of following what God and Jesus are nudging us towards.

Beloved, there is a LOT of heartache in the world now, between our disabled, LGBTQIA+, and black and brown friends being scared for their lives, the news of Alligator Alcatraz, the threat of war... Every day seems to bring something new for us to hyper fixate on, to wonder "how do I fix this", to say "is there even a reason to try?"

And while I truly do not know how to even start with the world around us, to love and forgive and fight for what I believe in, I do know how to pray, how to seek God's guidance and let that be a guiding light for my actions.

It is not easy work, and it's not always as flashy or easy as our scripture shows with Jesus saying "come follow me" and the disciples saying "yep okay, let's go", there will be times of doubt and worry and wonder. But along the way I hope we know that God is with us, guiding us, and I hope you can feel that in this space as we do our work together.

I certainly feel it as I reflect upon what we are doing together as a congregation and how the mission committee is helping steer our work a certain direction. Who could have imagined ALL that would happen when the mission committee first discerned to put a special emphasis on feeding the hungry this year? And feeding the hungry we are! Between Triangle meals, working with Rooted!, our little food pantry, and many other ways, we are doing a small but needed part of helping to keep Madison fed and serving our neighbors just as Jesus has called us to.

Some might say this wasn't a radical change, but it was certainly a decision that wasn't made lightly, and had lots of prayer and discussion behind it. So as we think about lives, our own discipleship and calling, what are the radical changes that you can hear Jesus calling you to? And no, I still don't mean quitting your job, selling all of your possessions, and walking barefoot around Madison telling people about Jesus. But what are the ways that you are feeling called to forgive others, to pray for others, to serve those around you who need it most? Maybe it is a radical change, or maybe it's something that feels just a tiny bit uncomfortable because "how much could it actually help?" or "I've never done this before". I invite you to pray about it, talk about it with a trusted person, and maybe try it this week.

Remember, our actions speak louder than our words, so go and pray and serve others loudly, be Jesus' hands and feet in this world. And when you're stuck, come back to these scriptures as a reminder of what we're being called to do: love our neighbor, pray, forgive, serve. Amen.