

“Travelling with Jesus: Staying on Our Toes”
August 7, 2016
Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church
Rev. Tim Berlew

A young woman teacher explains to her class of small children that she is an atheist. She asks her class if they are atheists too. Not really knowing what atheism is, but wanting to be like their teacher, their hands explode into the air. There is, however, one exception. A girl named Lucy has not gone along with the crowd. The teacher asks her why she has decided to be different.

"Because I'm not an atheist."

"Then," asks the teacher, "What are you?"

"I'm a Christian."

The teacher is a little perturbed now, her face slightly red. She asks Lucy why she is a Christian.

"Well, I was brought up knowing and loving Jesus. My mom is a Christian, and my dad is a Christian, so I am a Christian."

The teacher is now angry. "That's no reason," she says loudly. "What if your mom was a moron, and you dad was a moron. What would you be then?"

A pause, and a smile. "Then," says Lucy, "I'd be an atheist!"

Today, we are talking about faith and our readiness to act on it. The writer of Hebrews takes us through a quick listing of some of our forebears in the faith. The reading skips some verses where we hear about the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. We pick up with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Imagine if you were Abraham and this God, not one of your ancestral gods, comes and tells you to pick up and leave everything you know to go to a strange, foreign place. Further, imagine going and telling your spouse about this conversation with God, and telling her you plan to do what was asked of you. This conversation cannot have gone well.

At Kenosha First Church, we supported missionaries in Bolivia who had come out of that congregation. After the husband finished veterinary school, the couple came to Kenosha as he entered practice there. They joined First United Methodist Church and began raising a family as they grew in their faith. Imagine Heidi's dismay when, one day, Bill came to her and said he felt he was being called to use his education and skill in the mission field of Bolivia. That original call to mission was his and not hers. Both spent time discerning God's will. Still unsure, Heidi followed Bill to Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Neither had ever lived outside the United States. Both had to learn to speak Spanish. Now, well over a decade later, they are both involved in important mission work – Bill with Christian Veterinary Mission, where he works with local farmers to keep their animals healthy, and Heidi with Talita Cumi, an orphanage that gives children a good life in the face of various types of tragedy. They are a sort of modern-day Abraham and

Sarah, following God's will and leaving their comfortable life behind in order to change other's lives.

I'm sure those types of decisions are filled with fear and trepidation. In today's gospel lesson Jesus begins by telling his listeners not to be fearful. Have you ever noticed how much ink is given over in the Bible to tell people not to be afraid? Apparently, being in relationship with God can look like a pretty scary thing sometimes. He goes on to tell people to sell their possessions and give to the poor. This is a common theme in Luke's gospel. This is the passage that gives us the well-known words, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Luke then moves into language of readiness. We hear about a bridegroom who is delayed in coming to the wedding banquet. It would be easy for the servants to goof off and relax. "While the cat's away, the mice will play." However, there is blessing waiting for those who continue to work and be alert – those who answer the door as soon as the bridegroom arrives and knocks, whatever the hour.

We cannot always know when God will invite us into something new. When the call comes, it can be a little scary. We are often called outside our comfort zones. We spend so much of our time trying to build a comfortable life. I really don't think God begrudges us our comforts and our possessions. On the other hand, I don't think God wants us to hold on to those things too tightly.

Sometimes, God's call comes to those like Abraham and Sarah, who do not have a previous, close relationship with God. It must have been terribly difficult for them. Other times, the call comes to those in close and growing relationship like Heidi and Bill. No matter what, God often calls us to places and things we do not know and have not experienced.

Discerning the call and being ready to answer becomes clearer and easier when we know God well. Today, you are being called to a banquet. We gather around this table to be united with our Lord and with one another. We eat bread and drink the fruit of the vine in a ritual meal as has been done for 2000 years. We join with one another and the saints and angels as we praise God. We are given strength for the journey and courage to answer God's call, wherever it may lead us.