



North Shore
**Congregational
Church**
FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit...

“They Were There Too”
Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching
Luke 5: 1-11
September 8, 2019

As many of you know, we spent our summer reflecting on a series of individuals we labeled as ‘Biblical Nobodies.’ We focused on those who appeared in the Biblical story with brief, but poignant, narratives that spoke a voice to our 21st century lives of faith. It was a series of sermons and devotionals that started at the beginning of July and wrapped up last Sunday – or so we thought. That was until this past Tuesday evening, as I stood in the back of this room while Julie led a brief devotional leading into our monthly board meetings. I listened as Julie read that passage from Luke 5 that we just shared – the story of Jesus calling those first disciples out of their boats and into the world – and suddenly I realized that there was one more Biblical Nobody that we needed to encounter.

So, I have one more reading for you. This comes just a few chapters later, in the Gospel according to Luke. After the call story of Simon, James and John that we read in chapter five, the next few chapters focus on a few more stories of calling disciples and a number of healing and preaching moments with Jesus. In chapter 9, the twelve are in place and charged with their ministry and then, in the very next chapter, chapter 10, we read this...

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ (Luke 10: 1-9)

Nameless, faceless, nearly voiceless – this group of 70 anonymous believers who are sent out in the wake of the Twelve, for me, is the epitome of the Biblical Nobodies we’ve been exploring all summer. We know nothing about them. We don’t know where they came from. We don’t

know their status, their background, their gender or their age. We know nothing except one fundamental thing – they were there too! Jesus sent them too! Alongside the twelve who get all the press, there were these seventy working the harvest God for the sake of their Lord and Savior! We know nothing about where they came from, and we know nothing about what they did, but we know that they were there too!

I've done a number of these type of character-based series over the years. Central stories of Scripture, Biblical heroes, Christmas through those who were there, and so on. It seems that in each series, however, I end up being reminded of the same fundamental lesson. The heroic people and stories may get the press, but the vast majority of the work of God's kingdom is done by the nobodies!

Now, I use that term very loosely because, of course, these people we've been exploring are anything but nobodies. The reality of the narrative of our faith, however, is the exact same as that which surrounds us in the culture of our daily lives. It's the extremists, the grand characters and the jaw-dropping narratives that get the press. While local news outlets will try to combat it with their 'everyday hero' spots that they do now and then – the truth is that our cultural consciousness is entirely engaged in the noisemakers. The absurdities, catastrophes, striking heroes and love-to-hate villains are the ones that get our attention. The news stories, the blogs, the tv coverage, the Twitter trends – they don't surround the man or woman who shovels the drive of their elderly neighbor every time it snows or the or the passer-by that stops to help a stranded motorist. The nobodies don't get the press – but they are where the work of God is done.

A few weeks ago, as the family of Jackie Niehaus gathered at their farm for a burial service, I watched as Jackie's 7-8 year old granddaughter hugged and wiped the tears of Jackie's 100+ year old mother at the close of the service. With the purity of compassionate love that is so precious in a child, she repeatedly wiped the tears of her grandmother and then would lean in to give her a hug, then wipe some more tears, hug again, and simply repeat the cycle. That's the work of God being done!

This past Tuesday, our oldest came home from school and told us about new student whose family had just moved here from Mexico. She speaks very little English, has trouble knowing what is happening, and is suddenly surrounded by the overwhelming experience that is the American High School. Becca's friends, and one of those friends in particular, welcomed her in, have been helping her find her way, and have even been working with phones to help translate things for her along the way. That's the work of God being done!

I could keep going, but the lesson of the seventy is the lesson of this series, which is the lesson of the culture that surrounds us. The nobodies don't get the press – but they are where the vast majority of the work of God is done.

I use the word 'nobodies' very loosely, and have all summer – but I think it underlines the point. The grand stories of faith that grab our attention are wonderful and inspiring. The challenge, however, is that I think they can also send us down the road of thinking that that's what the work of God looks like. Parting seas, healing the ill, risking life and limb...these are inspiring stories

of people who stepped into the faith God laid before them. The vast majority of the work of God, however, is done by the nobodies – the seventy – the you – the me – the people who one day, one moment, to the next, find those powerful, every day, ways to do the work of God. It may be the grand stories that got the press, but for thousands of years, it is the nobodies who have written the story of God. So, today, tomorrow, next week – be a nobody, and let God’s story flow through you!