

“YOUR TEN MINUTES”
Matthew 4:12-22
January 26, 2020

The call to discipleship is likewise a call to meaningful life. We have no idea what our full life looks like; there are no guarantees. Jesus calls his disciples and gets them moving, for there is no time to waste. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church in Matthew’s gospel, the 4th Chapter, beginning with the 12th verse:

When Jesus got word that John had been arrested, he returned to Galilee. He moved from his hometown, Nazareth, to the lakeside village Capernaum, nestled at the base of the Zebulun and Naphtali hills. This move completed Isaiah’s sermon:

Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
road to the sea, over Jordan,
Galilee, crossroads for the nations.
People sitting out their lives in the dark
saw a huge light;
Sitting in that dark, dark country of death,
they watched the sun come up.

This Isaiah-prophesied sermon came to life in Galilee the moment Jesus started preaching. He picked up where John left off: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”

Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.

A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee's sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father.

Here ends the lesson. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

While driving together to Sterling last Sunday, Rev. Wendy Kidd and I had a deep theological discussion. We were going there to meet with the bereaved family of a 19-year old, the fatal victim of a senseless tragedy. This young man [I will call him David] had everything to live for. His two great loves in life were family and baseball. David was attending a college out of state on a baseball scholarship, but life's harshness did not allow him to finish even his freshman year.

Wendy and I talked about this very reality—that we never know how much time on earth we have. It was unfair that David's time with his two loves was cut short; so many markers of what we consider a "successful life" he would never experience: graduation from college; falling in love; the opportunity for marriage and perhaps children; pursuing his dream of playing professional baseball—the list goes on, but his does not. It ends here. It ends here with his Ten Minutes.

John the Baptist has plans. He is just hitting his own personal stride when Jesus comes on the scene. Jesus gives him notoriety that at once puts him on the pages of Christian history and at the same time

dooms him to arrest and execution. To be an outspoken fan of Jesus in that time and place is to put oneself directly in harm's way.

In Matthew's gospel while Jesus is away in the wilderness, John is arrested and locked away in prison, never to be released. The charge against him is never announced. During the puppet king's birthday party some weeks or months later, Herod orders John executed. Herod is drunk and enraptured with the daughter of his sister-in-law. On behalf of her mother, she asks for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Again, we don't know why. Herod, not wanting to appear weak to his birthday guests, grants her request. Just like that, John's life is over. Cut short. His voice silenced. It is unfair, and we feel cheated that this colorful New Testament figure will preach to us no more.

Rev. Wendy and I co-officiated the Celebration of Life service for David. It was held at Sterling High School where he had graduated not even a year ago. His uncle cried as he read his eulogy. His baseball coach remembered his work ethic. His sister told of how David had confronted some bullies who were after her and they never bothered her again. His friends from high school and college choked out that they will always remember his smile and his great attitude. His friend and his brother jointly read a poem we had selected. His great-aunt spoke a stirring tribute to him. Wendy prayed and I preached. And then we all tried to sing, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." The mourners were silent and detached, locked in their own grief.

As is common now in memorial services, his family prepared a video of his life to be shown during worship. Taken from photographs on cellphones and computers, photo albums, and awards ceremonies, David's stepmother pieced together a rough portrait of this young man, paired it with some songs, and stored it on a portable hard drive.

It is his Ten Minutes. Ten minutes to show the sum total of David's life. Ten minutes to bring closure to tragedy, ten minutes to give the faithful attendees at his service an idea of what he was like, the meaning of his days on earth.

His Ten Minutes was raw, unedited storytelling. It was not professionally produced; rather, it was created amidst tears and stories, from memories and candid snapshots, a family's love and grief all wrapped up into one package.

A theme emerged to us clearly as the music played on and the photographs cycled through the playlist: this was a happy, involved, loving and playful kid. This was a young man deeply devoted to his family. Picture after picture showed him holding his baby sisters, playing with them, cutting up with his dad, and helping his stepmother with chores. In each of these captured moments, he was sporting a wide grin, truly happy to be one of the gang-- a loving and beloved family member.

In the second part of the slideshow, we walked through his second great love—baseball. He started out in high school as a decent defensive

player, but as someone who had to have another player bat for him, because he couldn't hit the ball. His coach told him, "Son, if you want to play ball in college, if you want to *go to college at all*, you have to learn to hit.

Through sheer determination and hard work, by his senior year he was awarded "Offensive Player of the Year," earning himself the opportunity to play ball in a small Kansas college. It was a dream come true for him. The photographs in the video demonstrate his dedication and devotion to his craft.

It is his Ten Minutes.

The four gospel writers give John the Baptist his Ten Minutes, too. These are two lives cut suddenly short, but they are also testimonies to love and devotion that live on.

Jesus gives his disciples Andrew and Peter, and James and John and others a unique opportunity to make their Ten Minutes count:

What are you looking for? he asks them. *Change your life. God's kingdom is here.*

The text tells us that Jesus picks up John's mantle and carries forward his invocation to the ones he has called to service:

Come and see, he calls to the new disciples, *I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you.*

Follow me and make your Ten Minutes count. I can't promise you a long life, a happy ending. Most likely, you will follow me to the cross. But don't say no. Say yes to a kingdom life. Be changed.

Today as a church, we hold our Annual Congregational Meeting. We celebrate a wonderful year just past in the life of the church. Much has been accomplished and many seekers have found their way to us. God is good and God's goodness is alive and well here at UCC Parker Hilltop. So, we celebrate.

But we also look forward, for we are called not to tarry long at the well of our accomplishments. Spirit beseeches us to set out on unchartered pathways in lockstep with God and Jesus. There are new people to welcome here, new children and teens to inspire. We are called to be leaders in our faith and our denomination; having discovered our WHY as a church on a mission to bring the good news of God's unconditional love to the people, we are now called to live into this certain message of hope and inclusion.

What will be our Ten Minutes? What will be your snapshot in our church's story? How can we make sure that our legacy is one of devotion and discipleship, laughter and love, welcome and wellness? *What are you looking for?* Asks Jesus. *Come and see,* he says, *and I will make new fishermen of you.*

May It Be So.