

WGUMC January 19, 2012 Matthew 4:12, 17-22
"The Caller and the Called"

Square Dancing is not dead! And I don't say that just because we burned the barn down last night [at our Western Hoedown]! I say that because several years ago, an Old Timey band called the Tallboys played at the Tractor Tavern on Ballard Avenue, a trendy neighborhood in Northwest Seattle. That night a bunch of hip, good-looking, 20-somethings got up and square danced. Well, they had a lot of fun and the phenomenon took off and the Seattle Subversive Square Dance Society was born. They made a video, of course, and one of the founders of the group said that her life goal is to get strangers to hold hands with each other.

That could be one of our goals, too. And that made me think, what might square dancing and discipleship have in common? I bet you've never asked yourself that question. Well, now that I've earned my sore feet, I've got some answers.

First off, at a square dance you have a caller, and we learned that if you want to dance, you really have to listen to what the caller is telling you to do. Jesus came calling by the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter and Andrew listened. James and John did, too.

But on most days that's a problem for us, isn't it? One of our difficulties in the dance of life is that we have too many callers, too many voices trying to tell us what to do: our boss and coworkers, our spouse and children, our friends, neighbors and even complete strangers (even without holding their hands). And then we have politicians, TV personalities, advertisers, self-help authors, gurus of all kinds. They all seem to think they can live our lives better than we can. But this dance has only one fully qualified caller: Jesus Christ, the only one who knows us well enough to tell us what to do.

With practice, we can learn to distinguish Jesus' voice from all the other voices we hear, but how are we supposed to

follow him? There are hundreds of different steps in square dancing. But the only way to learn them is to get out on the dance floor and do them. Last night, we learned about 15. Let me tell you something. The Christian life is more complicated than doing a Chain Down the Line but there's still only one way to learn how to live it. Notice that when Jesus called his disciples, he didn't start by giving them any dance lessons. He just said, "Follow me." If you want to be my disciple, get out of the boat and start moving your feet.

Here's another problem: lots of us are afraid to move our feet. We sit on the sidelines, because we don't want to be the one who falls on her face. Well, when it comes to dancing, I'm one of those sitting on the sidelines. I've always been self-conscious, so the only dancing I would want to do would be in a very dark room. In fact, I've pretty much avoided dancing ever since the Klezmer concert Hank and I went to when we were first dating. But I bucked up and did my best last night,

because I told myself that dancing takes less daring than being a disciple. For me, following Jesus is like having to dance with all the lights on.

Last night, all the lights were on, and so I was thankful that I didn't have to dance solo. For disciples, I don't recommend it. Jesus called two sets of two brothers—Simon and Andrew, James and John—because in discipleship, as in square dancing, everyone needs a partner. And we don't have to be married to them. We can mix ages and genders. What I'm talking about here is a spiritual partner. We need someone who, when we're doing the dance of discipleship, will do a little dosado with us. Spiritual partners always have our backs and will always lend a hand to keep us in formation.

Now some of us needed more help than others when we were dancing, but all of us need help just living. That's what has been so amazing about the little dance we do at

Kaleidoscope on Thursday nights. We're all trying to follow Jesus, so we gather and read a passage of Scripture together. Each of us hears the words and tries to listen for the call. And then we kind of circle left and right around the room until everyone has shared what they are hearing. It's almost too simple. Maybe that's why it feels so real. I just know that when we read the Bible this way together, I hear God saying things to me that I'm pretty sure I'd never hear if I were just reading it to myself. So following Jesus alone is like dancing alone. You learn so much more when you do it with a partner.

One thing we learned at the Hoedown is that square dancing is something that even non-dancers like me can have fun doing. Likewise, discipleship is a dance that everyone can join in. You don't have to know what you're doing. You don't have to be able to "dance with the stars."

The disciples were fishermen. They followed fish. They knew nothing about following Jesus. But that didn't disqualify

them. In fact, quite the opposite. Their being fisherman meant that they had some unique insights and particular skills that they used fishing for fish that could be applied to fishing for people. For them, following Jesus meant using what they already knew how to do to learn how to do something new.

I don't know if any of us has put on a square dance before, but someone knew how to organize, others knew how to solicit donations, decorate tables, bake cookies, and count money. And that's just how this church dances. Every day, we have folks who know people and so we have them mentor teens and lead small groups. We have folks who know computers, and we get them to help us with networking. We have folks who know marketing and they work on our website. We have folks who know numbers and they make us better stewards. We have folks who know construction and they help us build for the kingdom of God. We have folks who know music and they help us worship God. So, everyone has something to contribute to

the dance of discipleship at Willow Glen United Methodist. And you don't have to be able to move your feet. As long as we have faith and each other, we will move mountains.

Friends, the calling of Simon and Andrew, James and John, is not the end of the story. The next verse says, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." [Matthew 4:23] Jesus just wasn't satisfied until he got everyone dancing and strangers holding hands with each other.

There I was last night, dancing with some total strangers and thinking that this is it. This is the spirit that we need for our ministries to succeed. We have some great opportunities here to get strangers holding hands with each other: confirmation classes, service projects, building projects, mission trips, musical groups, prayer groups, Bible studies. But we need each and every one of you to join in the dance.

We really count on you. As we learned last night, when you don't dance, someone doesn't have a partner. When you don't hear the call, someone else is going to miss their cue. And when enough dancers mess up, the dance falls apart. Then there is little we dancers can do except retreat into our respective corners until the music ends.

That made me think: you know the same thing happened to the disciples, too. They were doing their best to follow the Lord of the Dance until he got himself arrested. Then they all fled the dance floor. When Jesus was crucified, the music came to an abrupt end.

Well that was the end of that song, but it wasn't the end of the dance. Come Easter morning, the music started up again. So, I say to everyone who tried and failed to follow the caller last night and to everyone who has ever tried and failed to follow Jesus, don't despair. What is true in the dance is true in life: that no matter how badly we danced the last time, we can

always begin again. The Lord of the Dance has one more step
to teach us. It's called The Resurrection:

*They cut me down and I leapt up high,
I am the life that will never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.
["Lord of the Dance" by Sydney Carter]*