

**A Message Shared by the Rev. Gregory J. Rupright
at
Rutherford Congregational Church, UCC
on
January 16, 2011 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany**

Message Title: “Come and See”

Key Scripture Text: John 1:29-42

Prayer for Illumination

God of our baptism, whose Holy Spirit empowers us day by day, reveal to us your affirmation and blessing. Enrich our speech and knowledge, confirming the testimony of Christ in our midst. Draw our attention to your word that we may encounter you with the enthusiasm of our ancestors in faith and serve you with the daring courage they displayed. May we know and share in the beloved community of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Why do churches exist? This message answers this question. Churches exist to follow in the way of Jesus Christ, and churches exist to come and see what Jesus is doing through his followers – that’s us. And so this message is an open invitation for all longtime members, all new members, all new-comers, anyone listening to follow Jesus Christ and to come and see what Jesus is doing right now at Rutherford Congregational Church (hereafter, RCC).

Perhaps one of the first things about RCC that you would see is that we are a diverse group of Christians who question our faith. We do not always agree with one another. But we all are seeking to follow in the way of Jesus Christ.

I don’t know if those first disciples would have fit in at RCC. For that matter, I don’t think they would have been very good Congregationalists. According to today’s Gospel, Jesus calls a group of ordinary people to be his disciples with a simple, “Follow me.” The amazing thing is that twelve people follow him, right at the beginning of his ministry, before Jesus has preached a single sermon, before he has performed even one mighty miracle, one single sign to show that he is Divine.

This response of the first disciples strikes me as very strange. You might expect that they would reply to Jesus, “Well, who are you? Where are you going? Why should I follow you? What’s in it for me?” But no, they just follow right after Jesus, even though they know next to nothing about Jesus.

No, perhaps those first disciples would not have made very good Congregationalists. Wonder if they would have fit in at RCC? At RCC, we are progressive, questioning Christians. We do not always agree with one another. But we are seeking to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ. And

yet, maybe those first disciples would have fit in very well at RCC because we openly welcome those with whom we disagree. RCC exemplifies very well one the key mottos of our United Church of Christ: “In essentials unity, in nonessentials diversity, in all things charity.” That means that the unity that we seek requires neither an uncritical acceptance of any point of view nor a rigid formulation of doctrine. It does require mutual understanding and agreement as to which aspects of the Christian faith and life are essential. And one thing that is essential at RCC is love and genuine concern for one another. In the words of St. Paul the Apostle, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Yes, love and genuine concern for one another are at the core of our being. Or as one longtime member of our church once said, “RCC is about people. It’s the people that count.” Think back over your own faith journey. Think about your earliest memories of your first days as a Christian, if you can even remember when you weren’t a Christian. Now think of all those wonderful, perhaps scary moments when you learned something new about Jesus, when you heard some verse of scripture that you hadn’t notice before, when you laughed with someone or you received comfort from someone, or when someone said something to you that shed new light on your discipleship, your faith journey.

Maybe you are like the first disciples after all. You came to see Jesus. You risked. You didn’t know everything about Jesus, but you bet your life on what you had. You came to Jesus, perhaps lacking evidence for the move you made toward him.

And gradually, your eyes were opened more and more to who Jesus was and what he wanted out of you. You came – then you saw. And your eyes are still being open: in this message; in a hymn that we sang; through something that was said in the Bible; through a warm greeting or a gentle smile. And your understanding of Jesus grew.

Don’t you see? John says that you are much like Jesus’ first disciples who came to Jesus – whether they were good Congregationalist or not, whether they would fit into Jesus’ mission or not – they came to Jesus then they saw. That same dynamic continues. In your life and mine, we grow in our faith, we grow closer to Jesus and Jesus grows closer to us. Together, we discover why the Church exists. The Church exists to follow in the way of Jesus Christ, to come and see what Jesus is doing through us.

So come and see by staying for our Annual Congregational Meeting immediately following this Worship Celebration. Come and see what Jesus is doing through us.

Prayer for Blessing on the Word

Let us pray: O Savior, let us walk with you
In earthly paths of service true;
Tell us your secret, help us bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care. Amen.

