

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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## “WHAT FASCINATES YOU ABOUT JESUS?”

I do have a word from the Lord for you this morning. It's actually a question: **What fascinates you about Jesus?** What fascinates you about Jesus' life, teachings, death, or resurrection? Please take some time this week and ask yourself,

**Which stories about Jesus grab hold of me? Which of the things Jesus did speaks most to me?  
What parts of his personality fascinate me?**

Next week we start Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' key teachings. Maybe they fascinate you. Here are a few of them:

**Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness; you will be filled.**

**You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...**

**Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.**

**You have heard 'An eye for an eye...' I say do not resist an evildoer.**

**You have heard, 'Love your neighbor; hate your enemy.' I say, Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. Consider the lilies of the field...they neither toil nor spin...if God clothes them in beauty, will God do any less for you?**

Maybe what fascinates you about Jesus it is how he welcomed children into his arms when others tried to send them away. Maybe the way he spent time with outsiders fascinates you: the Samaritan woman at the well, or people who needed healing. Maybe you are fascinated by his patient answers when his friends demanded specifics on the night before his death:

**I am the way the truth and the life.** (Or as I might paraphrase it: **I will make the way for you; I am life itself.**)

Maybe you're fascinated because he allowed his friends to come to the truth of his resurrection on their own timetable:

**He did not chide Mary for thinking he was a gardener. He talked with two disciples all the way to the town of Emmaus before revealing himself as he broke the bread. He allowed Thomas to touch his wounds, his hands and his side.**

Last week's Gospel Scripture ends with two very curious men ready to follow Jesus. They ask him, **“Rabbi, where do you live?”** John 1:38 His response: simply an invitation: **“Come and see.”** Fascinating. Today's Gospel Scripture tells he started his ministry by fearlessly going right to the place where his cousin John the Baptist was arrested. He continues John's message, **“Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand”** (or as I might paraphrase it: **“Turn God-ward and the spiritual energy of heaven will flow into you.”**) Then he adds to John's message by teaching and healing. He's not intimidated in the least by Herod.

**We need to focus on what fascinates us about Jesus, because what fascinates us about Jesus is the start of our call.**

We all have a call. Often we make figuring out our call hard work. Sometimes we ignore our call. Each of us has different learning modes. Each congregation has different needs. In our complex lives, how can we determine how to follow Jesus?

The answer is simple: Look for what fascinates you about Jesus. That's the starting point of your call. Specifically:

- If you are fascinated by his ethical teachings, you are called to work for justice.
- If you are drawn by the deep personal connection between Jesus and the woman at the well, you are called to begin exploring a deep personal faith in Christ, and possibly work to bridge human-made cultural boundaries.
- If you are fascinated by his 40-day spiritual fasts in the desert, you might be experiencing a call to a spiritual retreat.
- If you are drawn by the stories of Jesus at table with outcasts and sinners, you have a call to offer holy hospitality.
- If Jesus' sermon to his home synagogue, when he quoted Isaiah, speaks to you: **“The Spirit has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim the era of God's favor;”** then you're being called to serve in some form of community-building ministry, binding up the broken hearted, and being co-creators with God in the New Creation.

**We worship a real, flesh and blood as well as divine Jesus. What fascinates us about Christ is his way of reaching each of us individually and all of us collectively. It is part of how the incarnation works.**

Good news: unlike Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John we probably won't have to leave our nets to follow Christ. We probably don't have to leave a father alone in the boat trying to manage the family business while we follow Christ. We will probably keep our day jobs while we make Christ the center of our lives. Most of us won't even have to engage in a lot of guesswork to make sure we are following Jesus in the right way. What we do need to do is tune in to what fascinates us. He makes the way. He is the truth. He is the life, all of life.

As we share the stories of Jesus in worship these next few weeks, please keep track of what fascinates you. I wish there was a way to sit down at every kitchen table and talk about what part of Jesus' life fascinates you. Since there are too many of us for that, let's try to talk with each other just a little bit about what fascinates us about Jesus' life and teachings. After we talk about the weather, let's slip into our conversations a little sharing about what part of Jesus' life fascinates us.

**Can we set aside things we talk about that don't really matter?**

**Can we diminish our inclination to critique everything around us?**

**As long as faith is merely cerebral, it stays one-dimensional.**

**As long as only our mental process guides our faith development we pretend to be charge.**

**We think we call the shots.**

**Can we move past our culture-induced self-absorption?**

Let me tell you something that takes my breath away. Jesus is so Traditional, yet he pushed beyond tradition. He knew his faith tradition very well. He knew and followed its "rules." He lived, ate, slept, and breathed Hebrew understandings of God. He loved Tradition; he was shaped by it, and he was also willing not to be limited by it when there was a need.

**He broke traditional barriers by talking to a foreign woman about her life until she, overjoyed, ran to invite others to believe.**

**He let his hungry disciples pick grain on the Sabbath.**

**He healed on the Sabbath to show that the Sabbath was made for people, instead of people made for the Sabbath.**

**He had a good time eating with outcasts and sinners, even though purity codes said he should not.**

Jesus understood that knowing / following Tradition gives us the strength to be Progressive. Fascinating. I want to be like that.

It breaks my heart when I hear colleagues say "Oh we threw all that traditional stuff out of our worship because people don't understand it anymore." Jesus shows us a different way: embrace all the Tradition, embrace even what you don't understand. Take all the strength thousands of years of tradition can give us and adapt it to meet the need of the people we serve.

This I know: our faith is not based in concepts. It is based in relationships. Scriptures are full of references to the fact that from the moment God began creating, God has been fascinated with us and fully engaged with us. Psalms and Isaiah quote God as saying to us, "I honor you, I love you." With every fiber of my being I can say that surprise, joy and fascination are ours every step of the way as we walk with Christ.

**So listen to what fascinates you about Jesus.**

**Listen deeply. Jesus is calling you.**

**Matthew 4:12-23:** When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he went to Galilee [where the king was who had arrested John]. <sup>13</sup>He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

<sup>15</sup>"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – <sup>16</sup>the people who sat in shadows have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." <sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

<sup>18</sup>As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup>He said to them,

**"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."**

<sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and Jesus called them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

<sup>23</sup>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.

WORSHIP SERVICES: SUNDAYS 8:30 & 10:45 AM  
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