



northminster presbyterian church

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roswell, georgia 30076

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SCRIPTURE: Mark 3:13-19 Hebrews 11:29-12:2

SERMON: Step Right Up! (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

Sometime between printing the bulletin and today, I changed the sermon title from "The Unqualified Twelve" to "Step Right Up." "Step Right Up" is a song written and performed by Tom Waits; it is an irreverent look at the promises that salespeople make, the deals they offer, the tactic of sales. I first heard this song just a few weeks back and I thought it was hilarious. Some of the lyrics are likely not suitable for church, but here is a selection:

*Step right up, step right up, step right up,
Everyone's a winner, bargains galore
We got a year-end clearance, we got a white sale
And a smoke-damaged furniture, you can drive it away today
Act now, act now, and receive as our gift, our gift to you
They come in all colors, one size fits all
No muss, no fuss, no spills, you're tired of kitchen drudgery
Everything must go, going out of business, going out of business
Going out of business sale
Fifty percent off original retail price, skip the middle man
Don't settle for less
You can step right up, step right up
That's right, it filets, it chops, it dices, slices,
Never stops, lasts a lifetime, mows your lawn
And it mows your lawn and it picks up the kids from school
It gets rid of unwanted facial hair, it gets rid of embarrassing age spots,
It delivers a pizza, it finds that slipper that's been at large
under the chaise lounge for several weeks
And it plays a mean Rhythm Master,
It makes excuses for unwanted lipstick on your collar
And it's only a dollar, step right up, it's only a dollar, step right up
'Cause it forges your signature
If not completely satisfied, mail back unused portion of product
For complete refund of price of purchase
Step right up
Please allow thirty days for delivery, don't be fooled by cheap imitations
You can live in it, live in it, laugh in it, love in it
Swim in it, sleep in it,
Live in it, swim in it, laugh in it, love in it
It gets rid of your gambling debts, it quits smoking
It's a friend, and it's a companion,
And it's the only product you will ever need
Follow these easy assembly instructions it never needs ironing
Well it takes weights off hips, bust, thighs, chin, midriff,
Gives you dandruff, and it finds you a job, it is a job
It's a redeemable coupon, no obligation, no salesman will visit your home
Receive our free brochure, free brochure
Read the easy-to-follow assembly instructions, batteries not included
Send before midnight tomorrow, terms available,*

*Step right up, step right up, step right up
You got it buddy: the large print giveth, and the small print taketh away
Step right up, you can step right up, you can step right up
C'mon step right up*

When Jesus said, "Follow me", to the fishermen and the tax collector and the political malcontent, and the various others, who eventually were named as the Twelve Apostles, Jesus was *not making a sales pitch!* No promises were offered, no cut rate deal, no easy terms! When Jesus spoke there was a very simple and clear call to a new way of life, a new way of living which the disciples were expected to adopt. It was quite simple really; they were to be close with Jesus and they were to *go out in Jesus' name to share Jesus' message.*

My friends, this is *still the call* that Jesus offers. To this day, the call to be disciples is no sales pitch, to which we can decide if we will respond when the terms are to our liking. The call of Jesus to us is a commission we receive from our Lord, a commission to live as disciple, followers, learners, servants of Jesus, in God's world.

This is the central feature and focus of this brief passage in Mark 3. Jesus is the one who calls, invites, welcomes and sends this hopelessly under-qualified, entirely never-qualified bunch to continue and spread His own ministry! The apostles are those who will respond to this call from the Lord. To respond to the call of Jesus back then, to respond to the call of Jesus today, means that we need to be willing to do two things: to hear the word of God and to do the word of God.

To accept and answer the call of Jesus on our lives requires that we make a move. That we move from where we are, to be with Jesus and so we can go out into the world on behalf of Jesus.

To be with Jesus, to truly be with Jesus, inevitably means that we will discover that we will be compelled to share the love of God that we experience in Jesus with others.

To go and share the love of Jesus with others in words and deeds, in patience, as we bear the burdens of others, as we befriend the outcasts, as we eat with the despised, as we drive out demons, as we welcome strangers, will inevitably mean that we will seek to be with Jesus all over again, returning to the One who sent us so we can begin to make sense of what we have seen and heard and done and left undone. We need to be with Jesus again to be refreshed and renewed and corrected and changed, *so that we can continue the cycle all over again!*

As *disciples* of Jesus, we are commissioned to *mirror* the mission of Jesus in our words and in our actions.

As *disciples*, in our words, thoughts and actions, we are to *mirror* the words and works of Jesus. We are not called to imitate Jesus as a child might imitate a parent – without sharing the depth and extent of the parent's genuine feelings, thoughts or emotions. Nor are we called to obey Jesus merely in the manner of soldiers obeying a direct order from our superior. Rather, we are to mirror the words and works of Jesus, as we offer our whole lives, body and soul, heart and mind, in response to Jesus' call on our lives.

To *mirror* the activity of Jesus means to respond to Jesus' words and actions by *acting and speaking like Jesus.*

To *mirror* the activity of Jesus is to *amplify who Jesus is* – not that we can amplify in the sense of improve upon the perfection of Jesus but we amplify Jesus as we express who Jesus is in the world in which we live. In this way we underline that Jesus is not past and forgotten, that Jesus is not just for one place and time but that Jesus is for all, for all time, for every place. Just as before the days of radio and telegraph, messages could be flashed by mirror from watchtower to watchtower, covering great distances, so our actions can serve to spread and enlarge the ministry of Jesus across time and space.

To *mirror* the activity of Jesus means that we *reflect in our lives what we can never create for ourselves*. Just as a mirror does not create images, but only passes along what is reflected; just as a mirror has no power of its own to illumine but functions on borrowed light, so we are called to share not our sense of self-importance but to let the life of Jesus be seen in our lives as we mirror the life and love of Jesus that all can come to see and experience Jesus for themselves.

To *mirror* Jesus is to let Jesus set the way things are to be, and then to *follow the lead Jesus gives us!*

To *mirror* Jesus, means that we are called to *attack boldly any and all structures that promote death or disease or evil* - to walk away from violence, to desist from any and all forms of racism, to stand back from unbridled consumerism. And at the same time that we work positively for change and all the positive values of human fulfillment, for things like accessible healthcare and meaningful education for all God's children.

This Jesus who calls us, this Jesus whom we name Lord and Savior is the *great disrupter of present arrangements!* Jesus is the great revolutionary! Jesus is not about tame predictability, stability, and caution – Jesus, the Jesus who calls us to lives of faithful discipleship is all about acceptance and attitude, bearing and beginnings, change and challenge, dedication and devotion, energy and engagement, faith and friendship, grace and generosity, humility and humor, imagination and incarnation, joy and justice, kneeling and kindness, longing and loving, and so on and so on all the way to the end of the alphabet....

The call of Jesus is both *individual and communal*. This weekend has been a great demonstration of what we can do as we work together in partnership and friendship as a church family. The Kisi people of Liberia in West Africa have a saying: "When a man steps into the center of the circle to dance and no one claps, he will soon tire and sit down; but if everyone claps, he will dance all night." So it is in the church, we need one another, we need one another's encouragement and support, so that we can all continue and extend the dance. Walking or working alone will leave us drained, sad, empty, deflated, but look what happens *when this congregation comes together, with a common focus, a shared objective, a united desire!*

"Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And Jesus appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons." As believers, as servants, as disciples together this remains our calling, this is who we are, *this is what our Savior asks and expects of all of us. Amen.*

Mark 3:13-19

13He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. 14And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, 15and to have authority to cast out demons. 16So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); 18and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, 19and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Then he went home;

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

29By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. 30By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. 31By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. 32And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— 33who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength

out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35**Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. **36**Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37**They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— **38**of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. **39**Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40**since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. **12**
1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, **2**looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

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