

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

Sermon Title: "The Church of Two or More"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

Ever since I was a little kid, I have always enjoyed playing games. I have fond memories of playing game, after game, after game of checkers with my grandmother. She was pretty good and almost always won – I don't think she was a believer in letting us kids win, but we still had a lot of fun. My brother and I for a time were obsessed with Monopoly. We were so enthralled with this game to the point where we even altered the rules to make the game last longer. Now, you may be thinking, it already is a really long game, but when you create a loan system so that bankruptcy is no longer the end of the game, you would be surprised just how long of a game it can be. We would continue for days. And then of course, there were the many hands of Go Fish, rounds of bingo, games of catch outdoors, and more. When I think about all of my favorite games that our family would play, they had one thing in common – they all required two or more players. Whether the number of players was explicating stated in the rules that accompanied a board game or was simply implied – a game of catch is not terribly fun by yourself – we knew that we needed two or more.

Now, there are games out there that can be played by one person. I may have just said a game of catch is not terribly fun by yourself, but I remember my brother finding a way around that from time to time. He would take his baseball and glove outside to where we had some of those big round hay bales and to preserve them, they were wrapped in white plastic, you may have seen that before. And they were wrapped rather tightly so the plastic had a little spring to it. So when my brother would through the ball at the bale, it would come back, at least part ways. So he found a way of playing catch alone. And yet, if I were to come outside, he was more than eager to replace the hay bale with me. And while, at times, I think the hay bale may have been a better catcher and thrower, the level of fun, the level of life still increased as we would play catch together.

Two or more. In some ways, I believe our very nature in life is to operate by this rule. That we long to share the spectrum of life with others. That life, like a game of catch, is more fun when shared. And this nature to live by the rule of two or more reaches, in my opinion, far beyond the idea that may first come to mind, of a relationship and a family, though for some it is part of it. But this rule of two or more is found and witnessed most profoundly in the ways that we find community. Whether by being part of a group or club that meets around a common interest, or gathering together with friends over a meal, or even by being part of the church, the nature of two or more certainly has a way of enriching our lives. It has a way of increasing joy, while also giving us community to be held by and helped by when life is hard.

And this nature, I believe, we can witness all throughout Scripture and yet again today as we hear of the calling of the disciples. In our reading from Mark, we see and hear of the community of Jesus followers beginning to form. As he passes the Sea of Galilee, Jesus calls to Brothers Simon and Andrew to follow and they do. And then again, to the Brothers John and James, Jesus calls and they too follow. The community of Jesus followers has officially formed. Notice that this community of Jesus followers, we will call it the church though the term church was not one that we being used just yet, notice that the church never consisted of a single person. The group that followed Jesus never had only one member. The church has always been a church of two or more.

Now why is that the case? Why, from the very earliest days of the church, of a community formed to follow Jesus, did he ensure that it was never a church of one? The answer, I believe, is multifaceted and we touched on it already today. Jesus knew the nature of humanity to be drawn into groups of two or more. Jesus knew, like my brother when it came to a game of catch, that doing something together rather than alone enriches life - increases joy. And at the same time, this nature of coming together prepares us for the hardest times. It gives us community with which to grieve, to heal, to grow.

You know, from time-to-time, I will have someone ask me if going to church is needed in order for a person to have faith? If going to church is needed for someone to follow Jesus? No. Faith can exist outside the church and people can, and should, live by the teachings of Christ not just for an hour on Sunday mornings but every hour throughout the week. But I think these questions miss something. Church is not just a place to go to, church is a community to be a part of. Yes, faith can exist outside the church, but a community of faith can enrich it. Yes, you can follow Jesus without being a part of a faith community, but church can support us, encourage us, guide us, and accompany us in the following. Yes, you may be able to follow Jesus alone, but is that what Jesus would want? From the beginning, Jesus made a point of ensuring that those who followed him never had to be alone.

Beloved people of God, I am thankful for the church of two or more. I am thankful that we don't have to do the work of being church alone. It is a shared work. That we don't have to ask the questions alone. We seek the answers together. That we don't have to deal with matters of faith alone. We do this together. The church of two or more is a gift from Christ, a gift that he offered the very first disciples - a gift that is still offered today. May we cherish it and may we share it together. Amen.