

FOLLOWING JESUS – September 13, 2015 (Rally Sunday) –

At start of service, after Concerns of Fellowship & Ministry:

SOUTH OAKLAND SHELTER REPORT – Danny Hawkins (let's be sure he wants to speak otherwise I will give it using his script)

MUSIC REPORT – Laurie Meeker

Matthew 4:18-22 (19)

Unison: Ps. 15

Hymns 1) #172 “Jesus Calls Us, o’er the Tumult” 2) #173 “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore” 3) #537 “Christian, Rise and Act Your Creed”

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: God is our light and our salvation!

People: We will follow, unafraid, where Jesus leads us.

L: Let us worship and serve God!

P: We will follow, strengthened and guided by the Holy Spirit.

INVOCATION & LORD’S PRAYER

God of light and love, open our eyes to the light that is always present in the world. Guide us to perceive and share that light with a world lost in darkness. Open our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to follow the path you put before us, so that we may truly follow Jesus. In his name we pray, “Our Father...”

THE SERMON

Following Jesus – this morning has been all about that, hasn't it? We've seen it in:

The greeting and caring for one another. The announcements about fellowship events, picnic opportunities, groups meeting for study and mission work.

The worship elements, and updates on repair of our organ; the return of the choir; the new fall energy, and music specially chosen to express the theme by our conscientious music staff.

The kids, literally following their teachers out the door into a new year of Sunday School classes where they will learn how to be followers of Jesus!

The mission things, already under way, a week ahead of our Month of mission activities. So we saw the children learn about what goes in an Indian Trails Box and why.

And we also heard about South Oakland Shelter, the program North Church hosted as a church wide mission in August. We saw how many people stood up because they'd done something – bringing in needed items, cooking meals, moving mattresses and making beds, doing laundry, driving people all over town to showers and work and the SOS headquarters.

Some of my favorite moments from the week were: helping at check-in and being able to open the door of the church and say to the guests – the SOS program clients – “Welcome to North Church.” I enjoyed meeting & speaking with the interesting people who stayed with us this week. I treasure the friendships, long standing and new, with people who partnered with us: members of St. Gerald's, the St. Al's crew who still work the food pantry, the Farmington HS athletes and their coach who made dinner, the Indian Catholic Association people, and many more.

And there was the assistance of our neighboring Congregational Churches: the loan of a big van from FCC of Wayne, the laundry done at the end by Pine Hill CC of W. Bloomfield, and the dandy breakfast Saturday morning by our friends at Meadowbrook CC in Novi.

I was deeply impressed with the importance of this program to the people it serves, such as the gentleman who had a medical emergency and was gotten help in the nick of time; the client who had her twin boys right after she got housing, and the others who came in so happy on various nights saying, “I'm getting my place tomorrow.” And for me, the thing that got to me the most—maybe even now—was seeing the guests sit down to a hot meal at tables in Fellowship Hall with tablecloths, centerpieces, our dishes and silverware, the same things we use to serve any honored and welcomed guest of North Church. God was in it all.

So many of the volunteers who took part in the week's activities commented to me: “THIS is what we are supposed to be doing.”

It is. As a church we do lots of things, but there are the things that Jesus actually told us to do: care for the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the widow and the orphan. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Be generous and kind, not harsh and judgmental and excluding. These instructions should take priority, if we are to truly call ourselves Christians, members of the body of Christ.

SOS was such a good prelude to our theme this year: following Jesus. You heard about Simon Peter and Andrew, casting nets into the Sea of Galilee when Jesus came along. He said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

We don’t know what they thought they would be doing, what they thought fishing for people would mean. We do know that they got right up and went. And as Jesus walked along the shoreline, he saw James and John, with their father Zebedee in the boat, fishing, and he called them too. These first apostles did not ask for a detailed plan or time to think it over or who else was going to be coming—immediately they left their nets, and even left Zebedee their father, and along with Peter and Andrew they stepped out, the first ones to follow Jesus into a whole new way of being.

That happened a long time ago. We know quite well what ended up being required of those four. We know what they suffered for the sake of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim. We know how they struggled when this big kingdom stuff seemed to hinge on sharing a little basket of bread and a bit of fish with a multitude of people. How they balked when they were asked to welcome people they didn’t know and knew they didn’t care for: tax collectors, prostitutes....Gentiles. And we know that Jesus did not give up on them, he just kept up the instruction: follow me.

So here we are, today. This is not a story for the past. Jesus is calling us too, saying “follow me.” And that is our theme this year. We will be looking at the many ways we follow Jesus. And there will be LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES for each and every one of us to do SOMETHING for our world as followers of Jesus. We will hear about missions and work directly on some too. We will be reminded that our stewardship extends to ALL our resources, our money, our time, our abilities, our hearts. We will recall again the promise that Jesus brought into the world, and how his teaching overcame the ways of the world to open a new path. And, we will learn how we can more fully proclaim by word and example, that way of life and light and love, of reconciliation and compassion, that way of walking on the Jesus path.

Are you ready? Really, who is ever ready? Like those fishermen on the shore of Galilee, we hear Jesus saying, “Follow me,” and we need to take the risk, to respond immediately by offering ourselves. It’s an adventure! And, it’s an invitation to join in God’s work, transforming the world into the Kingdom of God.

May God bless and inspire each of us and all of us together, as we seek to follow this Jesus path, today and always. Amen.