

January 25, 2015 3rd Sunday After Epiphany Mark 1:14-20

(Preceded by showing the Nooma video *Dust*.)

I have been told that if you put a group of people who never met each other in a room together the first thing they do is start to establish a pecking order. Even as they are introducing themselves to each other they are judging each other and competing with each other; everyone wanting to get as high up as they can get. And it doesn't take too long, usually under an hour for a complete social pyramid to develop. A few people emerge as leaders on top, and many more end up at the bottom. And there are stratifications everywhere in between.

Now you may agree with me on that or you may disagree. If you disagree you may be thinking, "When I go into a room full of people I don't try to get on top. I just act like myself and let the pieces fall where they may. If I end up on the bottom I don't care, and if I'm somewhere farther up, well, so what?"

But if you do think that way I'll challenge you on it. We do measure each other and create a pecking order. I'm sure you've crossed paths with someone you knew as a kid and they

were very talented and promising. But then you see them as an adult and you think they've wasted their life and promise.

Right now St. John Fisher college is looking for a new dean for the College of Pharmacy. They have a search committee and they are looking for people with the right education, the right credentials, and the right connections who they think will fit their school's mission. They've got a tough challenge ahead of them if they want to fill Scott Swigart's shoes! So what if one day Dave and Kristi Bullwinkle get a call that Thomas has been selected to be the next dean? That's absurd! It's laughable! He knows nothing about how to run a school of pharmacy. He's not educated. He has no connections with pharmacy leaders. He has no leadership training. About his only asset to date is that he's cute, and that's not going take him far.

Or similarly, how about if Sports Illustrated decided to do its 2015 Swimsuit Issue featuring the residents of Elm Manor Nursing home in Canandaigua? Can't you just see the cover, "Our models are wearing smiles but not their teeth!"

Like it or not, we rank people. We rank them by how much value they contribute to our lives and to our society. We elevate those who can give more, and we push aside those who can't. It's heartbreaking, but when it comes to nursing homes, we love the residents, we want to give them quality of life, we want to give them dignity; but the truth is they no longer have social value. They've fallen off the pyramid.

When Jesus calls mediocre guys like Peter and Andrew and James and John he upends the entire way we order our world. We cannot grasp choosing people who have nothing to offer. And it frightens us when we consider how inadequate we are too. What if Jesus asks the same thing of us?

May you know that God has faith in you. May you know that God sees value in you whether the world affirms it or not. And may you be able to reflect that same love of Christ to all you meet. Amen