

Follow Me!

Mark 1:16-20

Jan 24, 2021

Intro:

The Bible uses many terms to describe who we are. We are, to say a few, children of God, children of light, children of the day, believers, sheep, saints, witnesses, stewards, lights in the world, elect of God, ambassadors, servants, members of the body, living stones, so forth. Let me add one more, Followers. We are followers of Jesus.

Is there anyone who never heard about a conference on “leadership”? Is there anyone who ever heard about a conference on “followership?” There are many books on leadership but none on followership. Our culture is not interested in followership. But hear Jesus calling us, saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Rather singing a song I learned when I was child during the Vacation Bible School. “I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men. I will make you fishers of men if you will follow Me. If you will follow Me, if you will follow Me, I will make you fishers of men, if you will follow Me.”

Follow Me! As I read the today’s Gospel lesson more than several times as part of the sermon preparation, I experienced something strange. At the first reading, I heard Jesus’ soft voice calling, “Follow Me!” Then, at the second and third time, his voice got louder and louder. “Follow me!” **“Follow me!”** **“Follow me!”** **“FOLLOW ME!”** Can you hear Jesus calling you to follow?

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Follow me!

Last Wed was a historical day in our American history. New president and vice president has sworn in and began leading as our leaders. Some are glad and hopeful and I know, some not. There are sharp divisions among people, even among family members and friends. So sad. I am for Trump. Not me. I am for Biden. Some say, “I follow Trump!” and some, “I follow Biden!” But Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, calls us, “Follow me!”

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Follow me!

Last Wednesday, I cried a lot, for Douglas, one of my long-time friends of mine died due to Covid after almost one month long hospitalization. On the same day, I learned that Do Hyun, a friend of mine in Flushing, NY got infected by Covid and is wrestling with the virus. So are his wife and daughter.

Our lives have been upside down since early last year. More than 400,000 lives were lost in our country. They said more than 200,000 more lives would be lost before we return to normal. Too many lost. Too much pains.

We are still facing a challenging time. We are in a serious situation. We all must to do all things necessary to protect one another: wearing masks, keeping the physical distancing and washing hands often. Yes, it is a critical time. We must be super-careful and cautious for everyone's safety.

In this challenging time, the scary voice of fear, anxiety and worries keep coming to us and tempts us to get our attention. But we hear Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calling tenderly and softly, "Follow me!" "Follow me, and I will make you lie down in green pastures and lead me beside still waters and though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will fear no evil, for I am with you."

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Follow me!

"Do not follow yourself. Follow me!" We hear Jesus' strong command to follow. "What is your main interest and purpose in life? Your children? Your family? Your work? Your reputation? Your hobby? Your money? Your dream? Follow me, for you must worship no other gods." "If you want to be my follower, deny yourself and carry your own cross and follow me." Jesus continues to say, "Don't follow your thoughts. Do not follow your feelings. Do not follow your experience and knowledge. Follow me. Give up your control. Let me drive your car."

I say, "Lord, wait a minute. If I give up my power, my thoughts, my feelings, my experience and my knowledge, I will end up being nobody. Is that what you want me to be?"

Simon Peter and his brother Andrew tended their nets when they heard the sound of a single voice, "Follow me!" They "immediately" put down their nets and follow Jesus and enter a new life and a new kind of fishing.

It's the same with James and John. Like Peter and Andrew, they were brothers working together in a family business, mending their nets. Yet when Jesus calls out to them, they left their work, their father, and they followed the new voice to discover a whole new life.

By faith, Peter, Andrew, James and John followed Jesus. They believed in him and they trusted in him and decided to follow him. Then, look what happened! Their life was transformed anew. They saw a new world that they never knew before. They saw a new life unfolding before their eyes. They saw a new heaven and a new earth.

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Who wants to be miserable? Let me share with you the following list to be followed if you wish to be miserable.

Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use "I" as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them. Never forget a service you have rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Lastly, do as little as possible for others.

Who wants not to be miserable, but be joyful and blessed?

There is no long list to follow. Only one thing is needed. Follow Jesus. Following Jesus, the way, the truth and the life is it. Follow Jesus, the Way, and you won't be lost. Follow Jesus, the Truth, and you will be set free. Follow Jesus, the Life, and you will be full of energy and joy. What a joy and what an abundant life we are invited to enjoy with Christ Jesus.

Paul the Apostle expressed this joy of following Christ, saying, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Richard Rohr, Franciscan monk whom I consider one of my spiritual mentors, expressed his joy of living with Christ, saying, “My life is not about me. It is about life.” He was enlightened and delighted by the fact that his life does not belong to him, but does belong to God, life-creator, life-giver.

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Follow me, and I will make you fish for people. Jesus calls us to make us fish for people. This voice of Christ reminds us of his another invitation. (John 15:4-5)

4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

Paraphrasing his invitation, he said, “Abide in me first, and then, you can bear 9 fruits of Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” No abiding, no fruits. Abiding in him is prerequisite for bearing fruits. Likewise, following him is prerequisite for fishing for people. No following Jesus, no fishing for people.

Wayne Cordeiro, a pastor in Hawaii mentioned about a bakery located in a city where he used to live. It was situated in a bad part of town. The bakery was small and rundown. Yet at 5 a.m. every morning the aroma of delicious bread emanated from that bakery. People would line up around the block to get their hands on that bread. That is a parable for us as the church.

Can you smell the sweet aroma of 9 delicious fruits of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control emanating from Fairfield Grace? Can you see people gathering to enjoy tasting them?

Today I want to ask you to make a decision, a simple decision, but a profound one—to follow Jesus. Some of you have been doing it - keep following. Some of you who have just heard Jesus calling—start following. Some of you who are not sure you can trust Jesus—try it out.

I pray we may sing with joy and gratitude, “I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.” Amen. Amen.