

*Come, Lord Jesus – make these words your Word, that our hearts may become your heart. Amen.*

"Follow me." Would you have gone? Would you go now?  
Would you leave your business to hired hands and go? Immediately?  
Without asking, "Where are we going?" "Who's gonna take care of my family?"  
These men either had a lot of faith... or Jesus was unmistakably the Real Thing.

Well, friends, I believe Jesus is the Real Thing. But is he calling us?  
Our experience of Jesus is so diluted by time, distance, and distraction  
– and not having the advantage of his physical presence – that it can be dim.  
But I'm pretty sure Jesus comes walking by us, every day, and he says: "Follow me."  
I like to think he says, "I love you. Follow me," but who knows.

Would you go? Faith like we see in this story – dropping everything and following  
somebody into God-knows-what doesn't come overnight, for most of us.  
It is built and strengthened and nurtured. And it has to start with a relationship.  
In this passage they seem like strangers, but if you recall last week's story from  
John's Gospel, we learn that Andrew had already become a disciple of Jesus,  
and had brought his brother Simon to meet him. They in turn told their neighbor  
Philip... and probably they told their fishing buddies James and John too.  
So they were already believing that Jesus was the Real Thing.  
What was new on this day was that he said,  
"Okay. Now I want you leave what you're doing and follow me.  
It starts with "Come and see," and then it's "Follow me."

We see here several components to becoming a disciple: Meeting.  
Budling a relationship. Answering an invitation. Leaving the familiar. Following.  
We have met Jesus, no doubt, but are we building a relationship with him?  
For many church-goers, the relationship is with the church.  
But the church is simply the gathering place from which disciples of Jesus  
are nurtured, formed, sent and supported. We aren't called to follow a church.  
Jesus says, "Follow me." Have we answered the invitation?  
Have we left anything behind to follow Jesus?  
He doesn't tell us what to walk away from,  
but when we make a decision to follow Christ, we are reordering our priorities.  
And when we do that, we often find there are things that no longer fit.

Could be our career or a relationship; could be the ways we like to waste time; could be a habit, or the way we evaluate our financial decisions.

Those four fishermen that day walked away from a father they worked for, from wives and children. They walked away from their jobs, their source of income.

When we choose to walk with Jesus through a community like this, we give up some of our time; some of our money; we give up sleeping in on Sunday mornings. We take on the disciplines of faith, of giving of ourselves. Of loving people even when it's hard. Of forgiving people especially when it's hard. What "nets" have you left behind as you've followed Jesus?

When we decide to follow Christ as disciples, not just onlookers, we don't get a print-out of the whole journey. We discern the guidance, responding to opportunities, or to when we feel the Spirit.

We get the next bit, or we get a strong sense to do something, or call someone. But we don't get the whole road map. I don't know about you –

I like to know where I'm going. It took me a long time to start trusting GPS— I wanted to chart my own course, printing out directions.

And that pretty much sums up the human condition in relation to God!

Who wants to trust the guidance of a being you can't see or hear?

Even if you believe in that Being, and believe that Being is good?

We don't want to be guided by someone we can't touch or argue with.

We want to chart our own course. But that is not discipleship.

That is not "Come, follow me."

When Jesus said, "Follow me, I will make you fishers of people," those guys didn't argue. They went. That meant, they had to trust Jesus' guidance.

But they also knew that discipleship is about learning from a teacher.

They knew he'd teach them and lead them.

So, I knew I had to try trusting my GPS to guide me.

Of course, it has to be connected to the Web... and correctly oriented.

My first GPS I set up as I was driving, not a good idea, and I inadvertently picked the map for Guam rather than the U.S. –

I'm not going to say God can't find us, but we can't get our instructions when we're not connected or oriented.

A couple of times the thing said, "Lost signal 4 seconds ago. Lost signal 53 seconds ago..." (*that was mostly when it thought I was in Guam...*)

And I wondered, is that what God says when we go into a dark place,  
or let our willfulness take over, or think or say or do something contrary  
to God's guidance? "Oops... Lost Kate's signal again."  
If we let it, the GPS will calculate a trip for us. It will say what the next step is.  
"In .25 miles, make a right turn." It's always giving you the next step,  
but only the next step. It doesn't spell out the whole journey for you.  
God doesn't give us the whole picture either –  
only to the next corner, not around it.

We are on an adventure here, my friends. Meeting Jesus. Building a relationship.  
Answering an invitation. Leaving the familiar. Following.  
I don't know exactly what God has in mind for this congregation,  
but I do believe we are being positioned for great things, bigger fish.  
"Follow me and I will teach you to catch people," Jesus said.  
The command to follow comes with a promise of purpose.

We church folk can get so wrapped up in our nets, our business, what we know.  
And Jesus comes along the beach and stops and looks at us. "Follow me," he says.  
"I've got bigger fish for you to catch. I've got other nets for you to cast.  
I've got stuff in store for you you can't even imagine. Come on."

But what happens if we ignore his guidance? Well, looks like God will wait us out.  
That's what happened to Jonah in this subversive allegory of a reluctant prophet.  
God gives Jonah clear instructions: Go to Nineveh and tell them  
if they repent of their evil ways, I will not send the punishment they deserve.  
Nineveh was a wicked place, let's say the Las Vegas of the ancient near east.  
Jonah doesn't want to offer those people the chance at forgiveness;  
he wants them to fry. So he catches a ship going the other direction.  
What does God do? Sends a storm, shipwreck, big fish... three days in the belly,  
and then the fish hiccups Jonah up onto a beach. And there's that voice again:  
"Okay, now to Nineveh and tell them, if they repent, I will spare them."  
This time he goes – still reluctantly – and they do repent.

This is a great story of how God will wait us out. We can completely ignore God's  
guidance, but somehow God works with that to get us back on track.  
I wonder if, when we make a bad choice, chart our own course,  
is the Holy Spirit up there going, b"Recalculating.... Recalculating..."

God's guidance isn't always booming... sometimes it feels vague, and learning to follow means learning to trust when it's God saying something, and when it's you. I resisted the call to become a priest for a long time, because I thought I should get an email from God or I couldn't be sure.

I could see so many neurotic reasons I might want to be ordained – like so I could talk during the sermon.

Or because I like to be needed, or to have a clear role. Finally a priest said to me, "We all have neurotic reasons to want to be ordained. What else is in there? What is the church saying? What is God saying?"

Once I parked my objections and tried to see what else was there I experienced such a flowering of my calling – it was an anointed, joyful couple of weeks as I felt it just blossom and I knew I needed to go forward. It was not easy, but on February 7<sup>th</sup>, I will celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination.

I've had to leave some nets – a community in New York City that I'd been deeply a part of for 22 years; and then a series of leaving beloved communities as God called me onward. Eventually to you.

We meet Jesus, we build a relationship, answer an invitation, leave the familiar, follow him and learn new ways to do what we do best, so that others can meet him and follow him.

Will we trust his leading? Move from "Come and see," to "Follow me?" and say, "Yes, Lord, I'm in. I'm following."

It ain't a picnic – his road led to the cross, from the cross to the grave.

But from the grave to resurrection, new life, unbounded possibilities.

It's an amazing adventure.

And it starts again right now.

*Amen.*

**Mark 1:14-20**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.