

Follow Jesus
1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23
January 23, 2011

“What are you looking for?” This is the question that is often asked of us when we are lost and stop to ask someone for directions. We give them the address or even offer a description of the place we are looking for and they will either offer us a map, tell us how to get there, or they might even say to us, “Follow me, and I'll take you there.” We find ourselves needing to trust **this person we have asked to help us and quite often** we discover that we must change our direction. In today's culture we are a little leery, though, when it comes to actually following others. We will take their directions and might even follow the path they have told us to take, but when it comes to following their lead, we take pause. We are cautious **about who we choose to follow.**

In today's gospel reading we have Jesus saying to his future disciples, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” (Matthew 4:19) Our text is a little disconcerting in that it says the **disciples “immediately” dropped what they were doing and without** hesitation followed this new Rabbi, Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew there is no indication that the disciples had ever met Jesus before or that they had witnessed his teaching or any miracles. They simply dropped their nets or got off their father's boat and chose to follow.

When you decided that you were going to be intentional about following Jesus was it an immediate decision, a gradual transformation, or are you still deciding that you are going to follow? What does it mean to follow Jesus? In our reading from 1 Corinthians, we see that **from the beginning of the church people were in conflict about what** it meant to live the life that Jesus would have us to live. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is telling the good church folks to stop bickering among themselves about who they belonged too. He asked them, as he would ask us today, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:12, 13) We were baptized in the name of God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our baptism brings with it a responsibility to follow the teachings of our faith. Do we always succeed? No, but we are challenged each moment of every day to live into who we have been created to be and who **God calls us to be, and that is faithful disciples.**

“Every second of every minute of every hour of every day you are making

decisions. These choices are about what will change, and how. [Our world is constantly evolving and so are we.]... **How you are changing is up to you. What you are evolving into is up to you.**¹ So, while we, as the disciples of Christ, might choose to follow immediately, we still must daily make choices about how we are going to live into that decision.

Jesus says to us in today's gospel, “Repent for the kin-dom of heaven is at hand.”(Matthew 4:17) Now, we perhaps recognize these words as the same spoken by John the Baptizer. But, whereas, John's message of repentance had to do with “the forgiveness of sins, confessing and being baptized with water for repentance in order to flee from the wrath that he **saw coming. ...'Repent,' [in the context of Jesus' message]** means turn – change- a change of heart, a change of values, a change of mind, a change of commitments, a change of life's direction, not because wrath is on the way, but because the kin-dom of heaven – the reign of God – is here. God's reign has come near, is near, is at hand, it is here. Jesus is saying that, because the reign of God has broken into life, people can embrace it and find life; repent! Jesus is talking about what popular author Rick Warren has called 'The Purpose Driven Life.' Get yourself a new orientation **for the way you live, and then act on it! The Giver of life is here!**”²

What are you looking for in this life? It is Jesus who says to us, “Follow me.” “Follow me and be my disciple,” is the call that Jesus' places upon our hearts. We find ourselves searching for purpose and meaning, when in reality it is Jesus who is seeking us out. Following Jesus is about discipleship. That is what it means to “follow.” It is about discipline – the discipline of “giving, the discipline of service, the discipline of forgiving – even **when it would be easier, more comfortable, and perhaps even more successful** to follow another, or seek to be our own [Lord, should that be possible.]”³ We find in our gospel message to us today, like the first disciples, Jesus telling us to

1 Neale Donald Walsch (author). Facebook. January 21, 2011

2 Rev. Dr. Fred R. Anderson. “Follow this Fellow” The Madison Avenue Pulpit 2005. www.goodpreacher.com

3 Ibid, Anderson

“follow me and the purpose of your life will be made clearer, it will also change.” No longer were Andrew, Peter, James and John fishermen alone, they became fishers of people. No longer are we our own agents when we accept the call to follow. We are called to live into God's plan for our lives and our world. We are called to be disciples.

As God's disciples we are to share the good news of God's love for us in Christ, **we are called to join in the gathering of a community of followers**, a community of people dedicated to living our lives in God's purpose, a community committed to inviting and welcoming others to follow God as well. We are called to follow Jesus. That call to follow is also a call to living our lives differently.

Jesus call to follow him means living our lives such that they reflect his light in us and in the world. Maya Angelou says it this way, “Live your life such that you are a rainbow in someone else's cloud because clouds of sorrow and worry do come. Let us be a rainbow there **loving and caring for one another.**” **Following Jesus means living in a** community where love and forgiveness happen because our common life is created and sustained not by our own energies or commitments, but by the power of God. Following Jesus means living our lives in a disciplined way. Following Jesus is living into our mission statement as the people of Peace UCC: We are to nurture our personal relationship with God through the reading of scripture, prayer, and our presence in worship and we are to reach out to our local and global neighbors as servants of Christ. In following Jesus we are **to celebrate and share our faith, as fishers of people, by** welcoming all people to join with us in worship and fellowship. In following Jesus we are to ground and cultivate our understanding of our rich history and traditions and be in constant prayer following the guidance of the Holy Spirit who walks with us as we plant **and nourish the seeds of change. We are called to bring people into the transforming** presence of Jesus, understanding that it is we who have been caught – found by the One who is life. Amen



