

January 21, 2018

Come and Follow

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

SERMON

In the gospel reading for this morning we hear that Jesus continues to call individuals to come and follow. Not unlike last week's gospel where Phillip and Nathaniel were invited to come and be a part of what Jesus was doing in the world. Proclaiming repentance and proclaiming the kingdom of heaven, which is coming near, which he is inaugurating into the world.

At this point in his ministry, John has been arrested and so he leaves that area of the Jordon moves back to home, to the Sea of Galilee. And he continues to call upon individuals, in this case two sets of brothers. Simon and Andrew and James and John. And he calls them, he invites them to come and follow. And that is the call that all Christians receive. Come and follow.

For Simon and Andrew, James and John it was probably something that they didn't really expect but it wasn't completely out of the blue as it sounds in the reading in the gospel according to Mark. It's very likely that they had been down with John, had listened to his call to repentance, had been baptized by John themselves, and had simply returned to live out that life of repentance and readiness for the coming of the Messiah.

And when Jesus comes and says, "Follow me." When he invites them to begin this journey, they are already ready. They are ready to follow, they are ready to be a part of this kingdom heaven that Jesus has already begun to proclaim.

Now in the calling of Simon and Andrew, we hear not only that call to follow, a call that again we all receive, to follow Jesus. We usually get that call from someone else or through someone else. Jesus' call to us comes through those who have already heard that call, who have already begun to follow and who invite us to then begin that journey as well. To come to know the fullness of who Jesus is as Messiah and as the son of God. And that was the trip that the four brothers were beginning to make.

It is a journey where we learn through the reading of scripture and through seeing one another live out the gospel message. We learn what it is to draw closer to God, what it is to be a citizen of God's kingdom, and what it is to be a child of God. But the call to Simon and Andrew not only was commonly followed but also gave a new purpose. The purpose was come and follow, and I will make you fish for people. I will give you a new orientation. I will give you a new purpose in the living of your lives once you have taken the journey to come, to know, to understand this kingdom of God and what Jesus is doing for them through his life, death, and resurrection.

Then they will be able to go forward into the world and take on this new purpose. This new task of calling others, of inviting them and bringing them into God's kingdom just as they are becoming citizens of that kingdom.

We have the same double call. That call to follow, to learn, to know, to understand who this Jesus is. What he did in his earthly ministry. How he called people to repentance but more than that through his

sacrifice, through his passion, death, and resurrection opened to us an everlasting life. A fullness of God's kingdom.

And just as Andrew and Simon were given new purpose, so are we. Our role is not simply to follow, to come to know, and to learn, but we are also called from that point to be faithful. To not only make this a faith or belief of the mind where we come to know about Jesus. But to so allow that knowledge and understanding, to allow that Holy Spirit which becomes a part of us in baptism, to then direct how we live our lives, and live it faithfully.

It's interesting that the first reading is from Jonah. Because Jonah being a prophet, also shows the difficulty that we can have as human beings. As we not only come and follow Jesus but that we are called to live faithfully that life that we now know. Jonah was not thrilled with his call from God. He loved God and he was set to do what God wanted him to do right up until the point where God said, "I want you to go to Nineveh and I want you to preach repentance so that they might turn away from their sin and be forgiven." And even though Jonah loved God, was happy to be in relationship with God, he was also pretty convinced that Nineveh ought to be punished for their sins. And he wasn't thrilled with living out following that purpose that God gave him, to go and preach repentance.

Because he was afraid, he was afraid that they might listen. He was afraid that they might repent. He was afraid that they wouldn't necessarily get the punishment that he felt they richly deserved. And so, first he tries to run from God. Then when he realizes that he cannot do that he goes to Nineveh, he preaches repentance, and lo and behold the people listen. They repent. And God forgives them. Exactly what Jonah did not want to have happen.

Living our lives faithfully, following Jesus and what Jesus commands us to do, living in repentance, living a forgiven life. We are then called to extend that to the world. Our purpose may not be fishing for people. It may not be ordained ministry. We all have the gifts and talents that God has given us to live out our lives wherever we find ourselves. For some it's ordained ministry, for some it's being in the military, for some it's being a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a merchant. There are all different things that we do with our lives but wherever we find ourselves we are called to live faithfully.

To live the life of a forgiven child of God and to extend that to the people around us. Whether it be superiors, our bosses, whether it be those that we work with, whether it be people that we go to school with. We are called to live faithfully with what Jesus has shown us in his life. And that is to love and to care, to be merciful, to have compassion. To extend to others the same forgiveness that we have been given by God and we are often given by others whom we have hurt.

And like Jonah, sometimes we find that difficult. Matter of fact, too much anymore I see people living not the idea that I am going to treat others the way that I want to be treated. Too often, we see, I see people saying that if they're going to treat me that way, then I'm going to treat them just as bad. We're supposed to treat people the way that we want to be treated. Which means that even if we are mistreated, we offer forgiveness. Even if we are kind to others and they are not kind to us, we don't retaliate. We don't try to show them what it feels like. We simply try to show them that there is a better way.

A way of faithfulness, a way of relationship with God. A relationship that is the Holy Spirit leading us to see others and treat others as God sees them and as God wants them to be treated. And that is our new purpose when we follow Jesus. It may end up that it fishes for people.

That it actually brings people into a new understanding of God and Jesus Christ. It may bring them to a new way of seeing how to live life faithfully with a knowledge of God's love. And with the intention of loving one another.

It's not easy. Sometimes we are hurt when we treat people with kindness and love and mercy and justice. And they treat us other than that. And they hurt us. But it's not retaliation that a faithful Christian looks for. It is the opportunity to show the love of God. It is the opportunity to show forgiveness. To help rekindle relationships, to show what good can be in God's people. And to allow that goodness to overcome the hatred, the evil that we see too often in the world. Maybe as we answer God's call, Jesus' call to follow. May we also remember that as we come to know and love Jesus more and more, we are called to live faithfully more and more. To overcome the difficulties, to be like Jonah, to fulfill our purpose and allow the people to experience the love and forgiveness of God.