

Lay Message – 6/11/2023
Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

“Follow Me”

What a simple yet deep command. Christ’s charisma and aura must have been something to behold. He walks up to someone who is working in the “family business” and has great deal of time and skill invested in what they are currently doing and with those two words completely reshapes their lives.

Follow Me appears 22 times in the New Testament. Many times, as you are aware, the same story is told from a different Apostle in the New Testament, so there may be repeats, but even if there are, He said Follow Me plenty of times.

When you think of “Follow Me”, the verse I read earlier points directly to those Apostles. They all followed after Christ said to them “follow me”.

If you recall, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. It is important to remember how very devout John the Baptist was and how important him announcing to the world that Jesus was the Lamb of God. John the Baptist was a great prophet that had a lot of pull with the people in his area. He actually was so well known, that he had disciples. Did you catch that? John the Baptist had disciples. You may wonder why John the Baptist wasn’t one of the 12, but his mission had already been laid out through God. He had his own missions yet to complete. He was a great prophet in his own right and was fulfilling his own destiny.

So, John the Baptist loses his three disciples to Christ. That is actually a good thing. After all, we need two of them to start a whole new revolution. John the Baptist believes - and after he tells them that this is “The Lamb of God”, they believe and they follow. So, we have Andrew who immediately tells his brother Simon that “we have found the Messiah” (Messiah meaning THE CHRIST). Can you imagine what a joy that must have been? I know that if it happened to me, I would probably tell my sister, right AFTER I told Doug. Andrew immediately brought Simon to Jesus. Christ looks at Simon and says, you are Simon, son of John; you will be called Cephas (which translates into Peter). Hey, we have Andrew and Peter! What happened to the other disciple who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus? Hmmm. That is something I couldn’t find a definitive answer to.

In ways, I feel that it is sad that you don't hear much about Andrew. He was the first after all. He was the one who recognized Christ as the Messiah. His brother was special and Christ could sense that immediately. I think that is part of the reason for the name change. It should be apparent that God was at work here. Andrew was more of a manager of the group. He was the one who kept things organized. I could most certainly understand that was necessary when you have that many people following one man.

I think that the point is most of the Apostles came along with just those simple two words. "Follow Me". It is interesting when I think about the Apostles. They each had their spiritual gifts. It goes back to the thought about talents and gifts. I had a real hard time understanding the difference between talents, gifts and spiritual gifts until I was fortunate to have a class on that particular subject. Up until that time, I always thought that I had an immunity shot; where I was immune to peoples' falsehoods and could sense the real motive behind a lot of what they said and did. It never occurred to me that was actually a spiritual gift called discernment. It just served me well for many years and I honestly think it may have been a part of what has led me in this direction as a lay speaker. I had it when I found that a pastor in my past set off alarm bells. It is hard to describe, but I just knew something wasn't right. In the end, he was moved out of the Methodist church. What is more important to me personally, was that it caused me to think hard about WHY I was a Methodist. I had to do research and it made me a stronger Christian. I think that all talents, gifts and spiritual gifts are from God. It is just that the spiritual gifts will be guiding you to be the best person, servant of God, you can be. I think that these talents, gifts and spiritual gifts since they are from God, should be shared. Sharing of their talents and gifts by the Men of Praise is a perfect example of the impact that sharing has. They, by sharing, have made this service so much more special and more memorable.

When we look at the Apostles, there were obviously spiritual gifts about all of them. I would say that I am at a lower level similar to Andrew. He definitely had his discernment working when he met Christ and immediately followed him. He immediately knew the Messiah. He was so overjoyed that (probably with some guidance from God) he went and told his brother. Now Andrew and Simon Peter were fishermen. It seems that Andrew did not remain as active or perhaps demonstrative by Christ's side as Simon Peter did or I would think that there

would be more scripture about him. Then again, you need to have other needs taken care of too. What was the spiritual gift that Peter had? Probably wisdom. I have been hoping for more wisdom, but I think that finds you, not the other way around. You can learn and gain knowledge, but wisdom itself is a spiritual gift and without it, the knowledge cannot serve as well. It may come with time.

The Apostles, hmm, well who were they and what were their individual roles? Some stick out much more than others. Obviously, Simon Peter since there was to be a leader on earth after Christ arose from the dead. We have James and John who are nephews of Mary (well, more likely half nephews). I'm telling you the bible is tough on genealogy (especially to someone who is newer at reading and researching it). James and John's mother Salome was considered a disciple and was present at the crucifixion. She stayed on and watched when others could not handle it. Between Salome and her husband Zebedee, they must have been devout to raise two sons who followed Christ. They in ways encouraged it. After all, James and John followed after those two simple words, follow me. That James and John were devout followers of Jesus is clear in that they were martyrs. I wonder how far I would go? It is something that I try not to think about. As soon as I approach it, I get a little nervous. I should be that devout, but I feel the squeamies wiggling in my stomach when I go that far in my thought pattern. You must find that odd for me to be up here while some of you are probably more devout. I am not here to tell you what to do or what to think. I am here to share the message and what you do with it, will hopefully, do good to the whole world or maybe just to one person. That is all it takes.

Getting back to the Apostles, many of them were fishermen. It may have to do with the location. None the less, it becomes clear why a fish is used as of the Christian symbol. Of course, there is the feeding of 5000 too. Andrew had a big part that day. So, these Apostles were lucky, they got to go around following Christ and watching miracles happen. They had their spiritual gifts and they used them. We too get to do the same if we listen to the readings of the bible, read the bible and then let our imagination go. We have been given so much. We have been given Christ who made the ultimate sacrifice for our sake. We have the spiritual gifts that vary by person so that they are spread out amongst all of us to share using each of our strengths. We have been given Life and Love.

Think of Andrew the first Apostle, he had the spiritual gift of discernment and not only immediately followed Christ, but ran to share the joy of the Messiah with his brother who would ultimately become very important in our Christian heritage. Andrew, though not as famous, certainly did his part. It is said that he was quite organized. We need those kind of people. He went on to be a missionary. He also died a martyr. Then we have that other follower. Hmm, what happened to him? It is hard to say. Did he stay? Did he give up when Christ asked him “what do you want”? Did he ask “where are you staying”? Andrew was supposedly not a great orator. So, we see little about him but even less about the other disciple of John the Baptist who ends up following Jesus. Maybe it is Matthias but that remains unclear. Matthias, now there is an disciple that really is not known for much more than being “promoted” to an Apostle after Judas has committed suicide. Matthias was selected by lots. Well, at least he bought a ticket in the lottery.

Let’s hope that we are doing our best to be like the Apostles and using our strengths and our God given spiritual gifts. You don’t have to be a Peter. You can be an Andrew, maybe not the best orator but a devout follower who becomes a missionary. There are many types of missionaries. Just try and not let yourself and your beliefs disappear. We all have a mission....if we just listen and use our spiritual gifts to follow. And respond when we hear those two words... Follow Me.