

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Epiphany**

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*Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice.*

*Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today, now and always. Amen*

Isaiah 6:1-13

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

“Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men”.

That’s all we get in today’s Gospel lesson to describe how Jesus called his first disciples and how they responded. That’s it. In just a few short verses our Gospel writer says these fishermen drop everything and follow Jesus on the basis of his two-word command: Follow me.

At times to leave everything to follow a call that you know nothing about is a risky task and one that many people choose not to head or listen to. Because it is not easy to leave everything. It is not easy to simply leave the life you are comfortable in and to go follow some stranger. Why would you? Life has taught you or maybe it was what you were taught growing up, that you do not just leave everything and drop everything and follow some stranger. It is not easy to drop all that you have and simply walk away.

As many of you know that I did just that...and every time this passage comes around in our lectionary it reminds me of the journey that I have taken, and the one that I am still on, because I chose to leave behind everything that I knew and follow Jesus down a path I did not know. .

Come follow me! Three words that changed my life, changed our families path and journey and has led me to where we are now. It was not easy and following Christ is not an easy path, but to not head that call would have meant missing out on all the blessings and not being on this amazing journey I am on, we are on as a family.

Our readings that are set for us today give us insights and teaching on what it means to follow, moments that can define our future and what it means to be witnesses for Christ. Isaiah encountered a moment in his life where time seemed to stand still and moment that divided time: what was before has changed and is no more. It was a moment that defined the rest of his life. It was almost as if he had been born anew on that day in the temple when he saw God in such immensity that the hem of God's garment filled the temple. If only the hem, then how much more was there that could not be seen.

The epistle for this morning, taken from 1 Corinthians, shows Paul speaking of how he came to be a witness to the gospel and how we should receive it. He preaches on what it means to be a witness, in that one has to receive within one's own being the good news. That a person cannot witness to what he or she has not experience in the heart and mind to be true. He explains that receiving the gospel is not a matter of accruing one more good thing to a life that is already full of good things. Receiving the gospel is discovering in Christ a new centre of existence, a new power for living, and a new perspective from which to view all things.

As we focus this morning on the reading in the gospel set before us today, Luke, In his telling of the Good News, he shows us a Jesus who gave a command, and these fishermen respond immediately.

For some of us, the lack of details is frustrating. And this is something I find difficult very frustrating as I am a details person. We want to know: What were they thinking? What motivated the fishermen? How could they really drop everything to follow? This was their livelihood and they had been out all night, not caught a thing and now they have a catch that would set them up for months. But leave it? And do what? Go where? With what? Simon obviously knows who this man is as in Luke's account of this story he calls him Master and follows his direction, geta the others to do what Jesus is asking even though it sounds bizarre.

For others, the lack of details is inviting—our imaginations fill in the gaps. Perhaps Simon was bored that day. The nets had been coming up empty, the wind was too strong to go out

far from shore, so why not just leave the nets and follow this man who seemed to need him for something? Perhaps James never really felt like he was cut out for fishing. It was the family business, so of course, he was doing what was expected of him, but really, maybe it was time he stood up for himself and told his father he wanted to try something new, put down the nets, and do his own thing for a change. And Andrew, perhaps he saw something in Jesus's face when he spoke that intrigued him. Maybe.

We are not told. Apparently, the Gospel writer doesn't think it matters what they were thinking or feeling. What matters is that Jesus said, "Follow me," and that's what they did. We may wish there were more to it than that. We may wish we knew what it was about them that made them so willing to take risks, so free to respond, so able to walk away from the familiar, from the security of the predictable to go off into an unknown future with a man they hardly knew. But we don't know.

And because Luke doesn't tell us, we have to entertain the possibility that Luke is saying that this really is the way Jesus gets followed: without all the facts, without really knowing what Jesus is up to or where exactly he's going, or why he wants us to follow him. Jesus says, "Follow me," and that's enough. Jesus says, "Follow me," and we do.

Or we don't. Whether we think that Jesus is calling us to undertake even just one task, become more like him in one small way, give up one familiar habit to do something he wants us to do, let alone if following Jesus might mean making large sacrifices, large changes, life-altering plans, it's hard for us to conceive of the possibility of following on the basis of a simple command. We are not uncomplicated fishermen, as if any human life is uncomplicated. We are responsible people. We must make our decisions carefully, we say, weigh our options. Our decisions take research; our values need clarification. We can't just rush into things. We can't afford to change the directions of our lives merely on the basis of a very vague proposal, let alone just because Jesus tells us to. Really, it would be easier to follow Jesus if we had a different job, a different spouse, if we were single, if we didn't have children, if we had different friends, a different income. If our calling to follow, had no impact on any other person other than ourselves. If it meant we didn't have to uproot everything and leave things behind that we had worked so hard to get.

Discerning the call to follow can be tricky because part of what we try to figure out is when Jesus is calling us to come away from the specifics of our lives in order to follow, and when Jesus is calling us because of the specifics of our lives, that is, because we have the job we have, because we are who we are. Jesus told those fishermen, "I will make you fish for people." He didn't say, "I really need accountants, I really need some lawyers, but you'll have to do." It may be that he's saying to you, "I really need you to follow me in your job." "I really need you to follow me in your marriage." "I really need you to conform your family life to a way that allows you to follow me." "I really need you to follow me when you're with your friends." "I really need you to use your talents to help in my kingdom, to help in my church, to help in my world."

Today's story is a little unnerving, a little unsettling. Luke seems to be saying that whether we follow by making big changes or small, following means giving things up, just like that. Luke seems to be saying this is how one follows Jesus: without all the details, without taking time to consider all the options, without having much of a road map, beyond putting one foot in front of the other and seeing where Jesus takes you. Can we do it?

On the 24<sup>th</sup> Of next month we will be two years down the road of COVID a present time plague that has changed the way we see the world, it has changed the way we do our jobs, it has changed the way we travel, shop, engage with people. It has changed the way we worship and join together as a Christian community. But has it changed the way we are to follow and the way we respond to the calling of God on our lives?

Today's gospel story is about a decisive moment in the lives of these fishermen, when Jesus called them to follow and they said yes. But even after they said yes, they had to keep listening. Jesus kept calling them to the next thing, the next way for them to follow. Same with us: we are called again and again to follow, to put aside what's occupying us, and be about Jesus' business instead. To be fishers of men. To not be concerned and overcome with trying to make sense of the world as it is now and work out what traffic light, what phase, what stage we are at, but to follow Christ in what he is calling us to. Without the worry of working out the details...the first step is to say yes.

Since it's Jesus who calls us to follow—whether it's to move or relocate to a different community or to do one thing for Jesus today right where we live, trust this: Jesus won't lead us astray or abandon us. God has given the Church, including this particular church, the gift of the Scriptures, the story of Jesus and the Christian community, to form us and guide us. God has given us the sacraments and God's promise to be with us and nourish us for God's service in the bread and wine we share together. God has given us the promise to be with us even when just two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ. All these things make our willingness to follow not just about risk, but about promise as well.

When Jesus called those first four fishermen, they didn't make demands and they didn't ask for guarantees, they just left their nets and followed. But later in the gospel, when maybe they were rethinking their decision, Jesus gives them a promise. What happens is this: Simon Peter said to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:28-30).

Are we brave enough to follow the light?

To step out of the shade and follow the call?

To reach out our arms and be fishers of men?

Today Jesus says to each of us, "Follow me."

What do you say?