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**Follow Jesus-Where, When, How**

**January 22, 2017**

**Matthew 4:12-23**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from Jesus Our Lord, the One who says to each of us, follow me, amen.

When Jesus called my name, I ran away. I heard his call from the time I was a little boy, but after the death of my father and my sister when I was only 13 years old, my immature faith rejected any claim God loved me. I still believed in God and Jesus, but I never understood His love was for me. So, I ran away from my call to serve. God finally grabbed ahold of me and spoke plainly when we were in Alaska. It was so clear and supernatural, I actually asked PJ if I was crazy. Yes, you know she said I was crazy, but on this subject she said we should listen to God and we did.

That’s not all that unusual. Most of my pastor friends, when we talk about how they came to understand Jesus’ claim on their lives, say they first rejected the call and ran away. I mean look at the call of Moses to lead the people from slavery to the freedom of the promised land. God spoke plainly, all be it from a burning bush, but still plainly enough for Moses to know what God wanted. His first reaction was to tell God sorry, but I can’t do what you want me to do. He told God no because he had some sort of a speech impediment, probably Moses was a stutterer. God said, hey, no problem, I’ll give you the words, you tell your brother Aaron and let Aaron speak for you. Then Moses came up with a couple other excuses, but God was persistent and finally Moses relented and followed God’s Call.

When I was going through the initial entrance process into candidacy for ordination I was told one of the things the committee actually looks for is some sort of hesitancy or initially running away from the call. That’s how common it is to say no at first to God’s call. I ran away for a long time. Not so for Simon, Andrew, James and John. All Jesus had to say to them was Follow me and I will make you fishers of people. Think about what those four men did for just a minute. They not only put down their nets, they gave up their lifestyles, family, even the family business.

What if Jesus withdrew to Southern Ohio and as he walked through your neighborhood he came to you and said follow me. What if he said follow me and I’ll make you farmers of people? You’ll grow something new called a church and because of you people will grow in faith and love of God. What if he came to you and said follow me and I will make you a teacher of the Word of God? Because of you people will come to know me and my commandments as well as my stories and my ways. Or he came saying I will make you a healer of my people… Or a salesman for the Kingdom of God? Or a bus driver bringing people to know Jesus?

The people Jesus called were simple, ordinary folks. He didn’t come seeking the rich and powerful or the learned scholars. He called fishermen and tax collectors and zealots. He still comes today to call teachers and nurses and salesmen and welders and farmers and bus drivers. He even comes to call people who haven’t figured out exactly what their vocation is just yet. The point is Jesus is calling you and me and all of us together to follow him.

I finally gave up running away. How about you? You’re here and I guess that means you have answered his call. I’ve found that answering Jesus’ call in my life isn’t just a one-time thing. I have to keep seeking and discerning where he is leading so that I can keep on following. I don’t know about you, but that’s sometimes a hard thing for me. Don’t you wish Jesus would just show up in a burning bush and speak plainly? I wish I got more of those times when Jesus comes to me in a dream and I wake up knowing exactly what to do and what to say. Unfortunately, for me, there’s far too many times when I still have to go to PJ and ask if I’m crazy. If I can confess to you how hard it is for me, a Pastor with many years of study and training, a man who spends hours every week in God’s Word reading and studying, praying every day asking for clear signs that I’m leading this congregation where Jesus would have us go and after all that, if I still have trouble figuring it out, either I’m stupid or I need your help.

I’ve been told I’m not stupid, so I believe I can’t figure this thing called following Jesus out by myself. I need you to walk with me, worship with me, study God’s Word with me and pray with me. I suspect the same is true for any Christian sincerely trying to follow Jesus. The lesson here is that we need each other in our walk with Jesus.

It’s true for all of us as individuals and the same thing is true for us together as the Church. I thank God for those of you who remind me of the direction we need to be on. Even when I sometimes resent being reigned in, I still thank God for loving me enough to prune back the sucker branches that sprout up and sap the life out of the main plant. Once again, we all need that, not just me. In the Bible people who honestly and sincerely ask for Jesus’ guidance get blessed. Those who claim they already know what God wants and how to accomplish God’s will are the ones Jesus rebukes. He called the smug religious leaders of his day blind guides. I don’t want to be a blind guide!

Having said all that and since this is the beginning of another new year, I am making my call once again for a few people who are willing to sit down over the next few months and help to set the course for Trinity over the coming years. In my newsletter article I listed 5 things I love about Trinity and challenged you to list yours too. That information will be helpful, but to really see where Jesus is calling us to go, we need more study, prayer, and discerning. On the windows in the narthex we still have the string and clothespins we used for the Plates and Potholes fund raiser. I’d like to repurpose those for a new project. I have placed a notepad next to the basket with the clothespins. I’d like every person to post three things on that clothesline. On the far-left side I’m asking you to post your immediate hopes and dreams for things Trinity can and should be doing in the next 3 – 6 months. In the middle section of the clothesline post your hopes and dreams for what Trinity should be up to in the next 1 – 5 years. Finally, on the far right-hand side of the clothesline, post your long-range hopes and dreams for Trinity. These might be things you hope we could accomplish in the next 5 – 10 years. Please pray for God to lead and guide your dreaming and your hoping.

If all this is of God, I am confident your postings will spell out where Jesus is leading us in the future and that three or four people will step forward to help write the vision story for Trinity. As I’ve said in the past, the Vision is the second step in helping us discern where God is leading us. After the Vision Statement is approved by council first, then by the entire congregation, we can begin working on a strategic plan, or the step by step process of achieving the vision.

I’m pretty sure almost everyone here would agree we should try our best to follow Jesus just like Simon-Peter, Andrew, James and John, as well as all the other disciples. What we need now is a unified plan for doing that. Trust me, if we set a single vision and then a plan with long and short range goals we’ll be well on our way to becoming an even healthier congregation than we are today. One with much less griping and more camaraderie and one blessed because we are walking the path our savior has laid out for us. I know a vision and a strategic plan doesn’t solve all church problems, but a single vision gives us all something to rally behind and we can be reasonably assured that we’re heading into God’s preferred future for Trinity.

So, please pray with me… Lord Jesus we hear your voice calling us to follow you this day. Raise up from among us people who you have given a special gift for casting a vision of where you would have us go. Give every person in this congregation a dream and a vision for how Trinity should minister to our community. Give us all the confidence to step into the future you are calling us into. May we be blessed by your presence as we listen to you and to each other. Thank you Lord Jesus for the individual calling you have given to each one of us. May we answer your call immediately following the examples of Peter, Andrew, James and John, amen.