

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who bids us to Come and Follow, him, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

One of the great rites of passage in American culture is when a teenager gets their driver's license. After waiting endlessly at the DMV you have to take a written test to prove you can memorize the basic rules of the road. Then you must pass the road test. In order to do that you must convince the tester that you can actually drive a vehicle while avoiding the impulse to text message and talk on your cell phone and that you can put those rules you memorized to practical use on the streets and roads. Successfully jump through all the bureaucratic hoops and you become the proud owner of a laminated card that demonstrates to the world that you're a licensed driver (and also that you're quite capable of having a bad hair day).

Most of the United States observes most traffic laws in common, like driving on the right side of the road and actually stopping at stop signs. In some states there are subtle nuances to the rules that tend to vary from state to state. In some states, in fact, the laws on the books can be downright goofy. Consider these weird rules if you're planning a road trip this coming summer:

- In Little Rock, Arkansas, “no person shall sound the horn on a vehicle at any place where cold drinks or sandwiches are served after 9 p.m.”

- Decades ago, it was illegal for a woman to drive down Main Street in Waynesboro, Virginia, without her husband walking in front of the vehicle waving a red flag.
- In Montana, it's illegal to leave a sheep unescorted in a truck.
- In Oregon, it's perfectly acceptable to make a left turn on red as long as you're turning onto a one-way street.
- In Minnesota, it's illegal to cross state lines with a duck on your head. No word on whether chickens are still authorized headgear.
- Tennessee has a law that prohibits shooting at animals from a car, unless that animal happens to be a whale. If you see a whale on the side of the road in, say, Chattanooga then, by all means, blast away.
- In San Francisco, car wash owners are restricted from drying off vehicles with used underwear. And all God's people said, "Eew."

Sure, it's hard to imagine any circumstance where you'd need to use a duck for a hat or drive a camel on the highway, which is illegal in California, but there are still plenty of rules of the road that are essential if you're going to make it safely to your destination. It takes practice to safely navigate the highways and byways because no one's running in front of you waving a red flag to warn others of your approach! The traffic laws in Jesus' day were a whole lot less stringent and weird since most people of the poorer classes traveled by foot. As he traveled, he began to define a different set of rules for those who would follow him on those ancient roads and for those of us who follow him today. Today's lesson from the gospel of John illustrates that Jesus' rules of the road are timeless and vitally important if we're going to stay on the right track as his disciples.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is on the road from the place of his baptism, likely on the Jordan River near the Dead Sea, back to Galilee, his home territory. The road running along the Jordan was the main north-south route through the region. Jesus and his people would have traversed it many times to and from Jerusalem for the various Jewish festivals and feasts. Today we find Jesus traveling north with Andrew and Simon Peter, his first two disciples, in tow. Even though Galilee is the destination, we know Jesus has a much longer journey in mind. In Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter, Jesus encounters two men to whom he will also teach the rules of the road. Jesus gives three rules to which everyone since has had to follow if they're going to become licensed disciples of Jesus. In fact, I could argue that these are the most important rules ever put on the books:

**Rule #1: FOLLOW.** This first rule is the equivalent of Jesus holding up a red flag and waving it in front of those who would come after him. Note that it's always said in the imperative -- not a suggestion or a request but a command. It's not simply "believe in me," "think about me" or "consider me." It's "follow me!" To be a disciple of Jesus is to leave the route you were on and take a narrow, one-way road behind him. Philip is the first to hear this clearly-stated rule in John's gospel. Unlike the response from those Jesus called in other Gospel stories, there's no dropping of their fishing nets, leaving their family business behind to follow. Philip's first response to this rule is to go and get another follower. So compelling

is this rule, that Philip recognizes it's one that everyone needs to observe in order to make it safely to an eternal destination.

The first person Philip tells is Nathanael, who doesn't appear in any of the other gospel lists of the Twelve. John's point might be that Jesus' command to “follow me” isn't just for those original 12 disciples, but for everyone. Philip immediately sees Jesus is the one about “whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. Jesus, in other words, is the one to whom all the ancient Scriptural rules of the road point. Nathanael, however, sees the idea of a Messiah coming from Nazareth to be about as likely as a whale in Tennessee. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he scoffs.

Following Jesus means picking one direction, actually one person to follow. It's the equivalent of veering off the superhighway and driving down a lesser traveled, dirt road. It's a major deviation from the rules everyone else follows. Jesus calls people to follow him on the one road that leads straight to the heart of God. Too often we've defined the rules of Christian faith in terms of what we believe about Jesus instead of focusing on actually following him and doing as he does. Information is important, but imitating Jesus is really the heart of discipleship. The only way we can really know what he is about is by going all in and following him, which leads us to the second rule:

**Rule #2: COME.** Philip responds to Nathanael's skepticism with an invitation to “come and see” what Jesus is about. Philip doesn't try to argue or coerce. Instead, he invites him to come and meet the rabbi. Where Nathanael puts a stop sign, Philip sees a green light. Philip knew his skeptical friend would respond best to an invitation. This was the same invitation Jesus had given to Andrew and Peter just a few verses earlier. Nathanael accepts the invitation and, to his amazement, discovers Jesus already knows him. We're all invited to follow one who already knows everything there is to know about us too. When we come to Jesus and when we invite others to “come and see,” we know Jesus is ready for us and invites us to come. When we do, Jesus comes to us and makes his dwelling with us. No honking horns or waiving of red flags necessary... Philip will become a great evangelist because he sees everyone as simply needing an invitation and will spend most of his life on the road inviting others to “come and see.” You can read more about Phillip in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8. One of the key rules of the road for being a disciple is having a desire for inviting people to come and meet Jesus. Who can you invite to “come and see?” It doesn't have to be a stranger or a distant acquaintance. Andrew invited his brother...

**Rule #3: SEE.** Jesus told Nathanael, “You will see greater things than these”. Nathanael was amazed that Jesus knew him, but if that in itself was amazing, Jesus told his new disciple he hadn't seen anything yet. The rest of John's

gospel reveals the amazing things Jesus said and did. Those who accepted his invitation witnessed healings, exorcisms, miracles, the transfiguration and, especially, resurrections of the dead, and Jesus' own resurrection. Following Jesus was a ticket to a wild ride with many unexpected twists and turns.

Many Christians are content with doing only the come and see part of Jesus' rules of the road. Many want to follow only those rules that are easiest to obey and taking only the roads that are clearly marked, safe and smoothly traveled. The disciples of Jesus learned that following Jesus is actually a journey filled with strange and exciting opportunities to rewrite the rules of the way things currently work in the world. It's an invitation to run off the map and to either change or ignore the self-imposed rules that keep us, and those around us, from experiencing the true, abundant life Jesus offers. In another place in the Bible Jesus said to follow him we must take up our cross and follow...

We all have to obey the rules, both goofy and not so goofy. The life of discipleship, however, is a much wilder ride with a better destination! I thank God you responded to the invitation of Jesus and all you do in his name. Because you responded, the body of Christ is alive and still doing the mission God gave to Jesus through us right here at Trinity in our little slice of heaven here in Darke County. May you experience the blessings of all the promises of God as you follow, come, and see Jesus and all the marvels that being his follower can bring. Amen.