

Canterbury United Methodist Church
New Traditions
January 15, 2012

Text: John 1:43-51

Focus: Jesus is identified as the Messiah, and begins to choose his disciples. His requirement: Follow Me!

Function: What does it mean to follow Jesus? How can we faithfully fulfill the role of follower in the 21st century?

Prayer: Gracious and Almighty God, we come before you this morning realizing that too often we resist Jesus' call to follow me...that we like to follow our own agendas, interested in what will benefit us, and we ignore your call to serve the least of your children. Forgive us we pray for our stubbornness and self-serving nature...free us from the slavery of following the ways of this earthly world, and give us the courage and freedom to follow your son, Jesus the Christ. In whose name we pray...amen.

Follow Me!

Listen to these familiar stories from the Gospels with new ears, and see if you can hear the common thread:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea...for they were fishermen. And he said to them “**Follow me** and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. (*Matthew 4:19*)

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around, he gave orders to go over to the other side. A scribe then approached and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and the birds of

the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” Another of his disciples said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “**Follow me**, and let the dead bury their own dead.” *(Matthew 8:22)*

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and **follow me** is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it and those who lose their life for me sake will find it. *(Matthew 10:38)*

And, Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, **follow me**.” When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. *(Matthew 19:21)*

“My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they **follow me**. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. *(John 10:27)*

“Whoever serves me must **follow me**, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. *(John 12:26)*

Twenty-three times Jesus uses these two little words in the New Testament when he is about the business of who will walk with him in his ministry on this earth...**Follow me**. Twenty-three times when Jesus is describing what it means to be a disciple of his, he uses these two little words...**Follow me**. And after his resurrection, when he is talking with Peter on the beach at Tabgha about what it will be like after he is gone, he uses the words...**Follow me**. Clearly, these words of Jesus have great power, because Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel immediately dropped what they were doing and followed Him...what could be easier? And at the same time, what could be more difficult?

Reach over and pull out your worship bulletin for this service...you may have figured out that when we plan the New Traditions worship service, we try to tie together the central claim of the scriptural text for that day with the hymns that we sing and with the prayers that we pray. Well, we also try to pick out an image for the front that illustrates the point that we are trying to get across. And this image is powerful, I think.

Out of all of the images that Mark Lawrence gave me to pick from for this week, this is the only one that depicts Jesus from the back...and the more I thought about this, the more I couldn't remember Jesus ever being shown this way--from the back...here in the chapel—Jesus from the front with the

children...in the sanctuary—Jesus from the front...at his baptism—Jesus from the front...at the sermon on the Mount---Jesus from the front...Jesus healing the blind man at Jericho—from the front...Jesus in front of the Sanhedrin.--- from the front...at the crucifixion---Jesus from the front.

Yet here is Jesus from the back...this is the view that a follower would see.

This past weekend, my family and I were in New Orleans for the football game. We stayed downtown by the river and tried to see as much of what the city had to offer while we were there as we could. Which meant that we walked a lot...to the World War II museum...to the trolley at St. Charles...to our restaurant....to Jackson Square...to Café du Monde...to the SuperDome...you get the idea. All the walking was really great exercise, but the more we walked the more my legs hurt...and the more my legs hurt, the further behind Valerie and Wilson and Dixon I got. A lot of the time while we were walking, my view of them was kind of like this...what I saw of them was their backs... which meant, I was a follower.

Our text this morning on the second Sunday after Epiphany has two main points: it deals with who Jesus is....the Son of God, King of Israel, the Messiah...and it deals with what we are called to do— to follow him. It

connects God's heavenly divine realm with our human earthly existence. And what is the connection? The appearance of Jesus...of God in human skin...to show us the Way. Jesus uses Old Testament imagery of angels ascending and descending to explain to Nathaniel who he really is. The description echoes the story of Jacob from Genesis, and his dream at Bethel. One commentator puts it this way, "Jesus the Son of Man is the ultimate ladder stretching between heaven and earth...Jesus is the point of contact between the finite and the infinite, the conjunction of time and eternity.

And like Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel, Philip and Nathaniel's encounter with Jesus in the Galilee left them changed men. The power and sheer force of attraction that they encountered in Jesus changed their direction in life. Like Peter, like Andrew, Jesus said to Philip: "Follow me" and they became followers...they became disciples.

The power of this raises the question for you and me today: what does it mean to be a faithful follower of Jesus today...here...now...in our community? What does it mean to answer Jesus' call to "Follow Me?"

And although I think I need to resist talking about the old story of the number two sled dog, it seems to me that a follower has different view of the world...that they are willing to see the world differently...through the lens or the viewpoint of the one that they are following. In order to follow faithfully, a follower gives up the right to lead...to choose the direction that he or she is

heading. In order to follow faithfully, a follower gives up the right to set the pace...a follower has to adapt himself to the pace of the one that is leading. In order to follow faithfully, a follower gives up the right to pursue distractions or competing opportunities along the way that would pull him or her off the path. Because if the follower does, they are not really following.

This sounds easy...to follow someone or something that we find attractive...but the truth is that is that I think it goes against our nature to follow. It is antiethical to our cultural upbringing...we are taught to be leaders...we are taught to think independently...we are acculturated to be self-sufficient...we are taught to set and achieve our own goals. We are not taught, very well I think, these days, how to follow.

I want to suggest to you this morning that being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ today requires that you are willing to be different...to see the world differently...and to respond to the distractions and the tugs and pulls of the world differently. To think first of others, rather than ourselves...to lessen the pull of money on our lives...to be willing to jump over cultural boundaries of race and economic class and self-interest to care for others...to be willing to put our relationship with the Lord our God as the most important relationship in our lives above all others, bar none. Because the Way that Jesus calls us to is in a different direction...if we look like everyone else, if we act like everyone else, if our faith creates no detectable difference in who we are and how we live

our lives...it is not Jesus' path that we are on...it is not Him that we are following.

“And Jesus said to them, follow me. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. What will you do when Jesus turns to you and says, “Follow me?””

Amen and amen.