

“Follow”

Isaiah 9:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

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Leadership. I've been thinking a lot about leadership recently. Maybe it's because the campaigns that are going on and we are continuing being bombarded with people saying that they would be good leaders. But it's also the fact that we have some new leaders for our church that we are ordaining today, installing to help guide the church in its mission and work. But as I was thinking about leadership, I was reminded of what a friend of mine used to say, "In any gift there's always a temptation." And so I think it is with leadership. There's a temptation in leadership to make being a leader all that there is, thinking that we're always supposed to be out in front, always the one in the lead and maybe even get to the point where we think we're supposed to know it all. It's an easy fallacy to see.

First of all, if we were all leaders, who could follow? The other thing is, we all are followers, really. We don't want to try to start everything again - each lifetime discover fire, re-invent the wheel. We follow in the footsteps of those who have come before us and we want to. We want to learn from them, so actually following is a wonderful thing. It's often we are following even as we lead.

Jesus invites his disciples to follow him. Those fellows along the sea he invites to follow. "Follow me," he says, "out of the land of darkness into the light." He's inviting them to change their lives. He reminds me of being up on Moscow Mountain last weekend and trying to walk through the deep snow. As I tried to make it through that snow it almost became as if I were going to get stuck. In fact, I've been in snow that it would have been easy to get lost in. It was hard to walk in that snow where no one had gone before. But if I asked one of the boys to hand me the snowshoes, I have tools that helped me walk in that snow. And if I let one of them go ahead and pack it down, now it's a lot easier to walk in that snow! You know, I think that is in many ways what Christ is saying to us. Don't flounder there in life; don't flounder in the deep snow of life. I give you these tools - God's grace. The variety of ways that Jesus guides us really are tools for living, snowshoes that help us get out of that deep snow and quit floundering so much. Indeed, I believe it is as we hear his invitation to follow, not only are we given the tools but we get a packed path. A packed path on which to walk. If you've ever gone from floundering in deep snow to walking on a packed path, it is a feeling of freedom, to be free again, to move, to do the very thing that we're able to do, walk. So Jesus invites us to follow him.

Often times when we think about the idea of meeting Jesus, as these disciples discovered Jesus, and began to encounter God's grace, it was for them just a beginning. Sometimes I think that we notice how much of a change there is in encountering Christ, encountering the forgiveness and grace and love of God, we kind of think "that's it!" Life's over. But none of us want it to be over, do we? It really is not. It is really just the beginning of the story. No longer are we floundering in the deep snow, but we are given the opportunity to have the tools for living, to walk the packed path, to go somewhere. I think that as we begin to look at these verses we can see a little bit of where it is that we are invited to go.

Now a caveat is that the world may not think it's such a great thing. Paul's describing that in Corinthians - a good man doing a good thing for basically bad people, a fallen people. That seems crazy! Why would a good man do good things for bad people? I think we really know the answer to that - God loves us enough, loves the people who struggle enough, that he's doing that good thing to help us out of the rut onto the path. He's calling us to follow. As God comes to care, to love us, to show us grace, to encourage us in our lives, he's calling us to do the same thing, to care for each other, to love one another, to give each other grace, to come into community together. In fact, Jesus went out from there healing people of their diseases and sickness. Remember in that day, healing was not only about the physical ailment, it was being separated out from community as well. That healing was bringing people back into community together, living as one, as a community. One of that ways I see Jesus giving us that packed path is that as we work at loving one another, it's a lot easier to live. It's a lot easier to live to with people who are trying to do the right thing, who are trying to love one another, who are trying to care for one another that it is when that's not the case. That's part of the packed path - that Jesus invites us to come along as we follow Him, we follow and find where he is leading us. Part of that path then is caring for one another, living in that community of believers where there is grace and the gift of life, the opportunity to care for one another. And even as we see Jesus leading us into that life where we try to care for one another, that we follow him on that path, it's also that we share this Good News. He doesn't say, "Follow me and forget everyone else". He says "Follow me and experience the wonders of God's grace and share it.

He then really tells those first fishermen to change your focus from caring about your own lives and begin to look elsewhere. Change your focus from fishing to put food on the table and change and recognize the people around you. In a way he's saying "cast a wide net"; cast God's love and grace widely over those all around you to be fishers of people, sharing the love of God and caring for one another.

Jesus called his disciples over 2000 years ago, just as he calls disciples today. "Follow me," He says. "In spite of the world's derision, with tools I give and taking the packed path, live according to the path I give." We see the path is care of God's will and what is good for our neighbor. We are called to share the love and grace of God. Essentially Jesus calls us to follow and share and care according to the love first given us. Amen.