

The Second Sunday After the Epiphany – 2020

1 Samuel 3:1-20

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

Follow me; what do you suppose that it means? Jesus came up to Matthew, a scoundrel, and said those words: “Follow me” (Matthew 9:9). Matthew was a known scoundrel because he was a tax collector. So, get this; an Israelite collects money from other Israelites and then gives that money to the Roman government, a foreign, occupying power in Israel. Rome collected taxes from the citizens that they were oppressing in order to pay their soldiers who were the muscle in town, to pay the Roman political structure, including the fellow who would sentence the King of the Jews to death. Tax collectors at the time were notoriously unscrupulous – skimming money off the top to line their pockets before actually delivering the people’s money to the entity that oppressed them. What do you suppose Matthew’s life was like? Not a popular guy with the people, not a clear conscience, not a clear path out of that life – from my perspective, Matthew’s life wasn’t super terrific. And into his ears the Lord of heaven and earth puts a direct call: “Follow me.”

What do you suppose that means? Is it as simple as a game of “Follow the Leader” or “Simon Says”? “Hey, Matthew, I’d like you to saddle up and ride in my posse. It’ll be great. C’mon.” What did Matthew think of the invitation? He wrote about it, actually. Perhaps the most pivotal moment in his life, Matthew tells us *exactly* what happened after Jesus said: “Follow me.” This is what Matthew the scoundrel writes about himself: “And he rose and followed him” (Matthew 9:9). Luke, writing about the same episode, is a little more descriptive. “And leaving everything, he rose and followed him” (Luke 5:28). Leaving everything; do you suppose that that means what it sounds like? Was Matthew called to trade one life for another? That sounds pretty radical.

We do know that Matthew was in a celebratory mood. Feeling festive, ‘ole Matthew threw a party. But who to invite? The only people he knew, perhaps the only people who would associate with him were other scumbags. Well, there’s nothing for it – Matthew invites maybe *all* the scumbags he knew to come have a feast at his home in honor of Jesus. Curiously, some very religious people are there, the Pharisees. It’s curious because they are kind of uptight about the company they keep. They are kind of uptight about the company that they think *Jesus* ought to keep. So, some of these Pharisees sidle up to the Lord’s disciples and they get a bit snarky: “Hey bro, why does your Teacher eat and drink with all these scumbags?” Jesus hears it, (doesn’t He hear everything?) and He sets everybody straight. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12-13).

One thing’s for sure, if Jesus calls you then you know what category to put yourself. It’s interesting what sinners do when Jesus calls them. James and John, the Sons of Zebedee, fishermen by trade – Jesus called them. “Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:22). Andrew and Simon have pretty much the same story. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and follow him” (Matthew 4:19-20). Not much looking back. A pillar of salt doesn’t make for a good disciple.

Follow me. The words are direct, without adornment. Follow me. Hidden within those words is the very power of God and His will to save. Follow me. It is as much a command as an invitation. Follow me. There is no sales pitch; no promise of a victorious crusade, or worldly success or emotional highs or a material payoff. Follow me. We are all following something. Everyone you know is following *something*. What guides *you*, what directs *your* life, what commands *your* allegiance?

Follow me. Has the Lord called you? For what purpose would the Lord of all creation call *you*? It's a good question. The text says that Jesus *decided* to go to Galilee – the emphasis is on His intent, Him purposefully going to Galilee is unmistakable – and His purpose was to find Philip. “He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me’” (John 1:43). What He seeks, He finds. What He finds, He calls. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). More than Philip, more than Nathanael, in addition to James and John, beyond Andrew and Peter – the Lord Christ comes seeking and finding and calling – He is after you. With great love, with a desire to call you into His life, His divine voice invades your mind and heart and calls you to be His. Follow me. He has decided to come here, where two or three are gathered in His name, for the purpose of calling you to Himself. Follow me. Into my death and resurrection, into the source of love and life, follow me and leave behind all that is empty and vain and false.

What have you left behind? Lot's wife looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah as the Lord destroyed those radically corrupt towns by raining sulfur and fire upon them. Lot's wife looked back because she was reluctant to leave. She was turned into a pillar of salt. Destruction of that place took her. She looked back. What have you left behind? As you follow Christ, what have you left behind? Mercilessness? Have you left your mercilessness for others behind? Or do you look back by harboring bitterness, a vengeful spirit? Follow me. Do you think that Christ calls us to leave behind the aberrations of our fallen nature? Alcohol abuse... have you left it behind? Follow me. Have you left behind deceit? Following the One who is the Truth requires you leave behind deceit. Sinners know what they do. Disciples of Christ repent. We follow Him. We don't follow abstract religious principles. Christianity is about following the world-redeeming Messiah who is present with His sacrifice, present with His resurrection, present with His love and His forgiveness and the sweetness of His company. What would we *not* leave behind in order to follow Him? We value His teaching because we are following Him. In fact, there is no other way to follow Him. You are unique, special, valuable, loved. Because you are, intrinsically, those things to Him, He calls you. Follow me.

Following Jesus takes Philip to Nathanael. The Messianic King, we have found Him! Jesus of Nazareth! Nathanael is unimpressed. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Come and see. It was a simple reply, simple and evangelical; come and see. Philip knew; the best way for Nathanael to view the incarnate Scriptural mosaic was for Nathanael to see it for himself. Come and see. You are Philip for a world of Nathanaels. That event is recapitulated, over and over in Christ's church. Come and see. Bring people here! In this place the Messianic mosaic of salvation is assembled for all to view. Christ made it clear: He knew Nathanael, knew his character, his life, his outlook. He knows you, doesn't He? His Word makes it clear that He knows you – how applicable His Word is to your life, how pertinent to your situation, how relevant to what goes on in your soul... He knows you. He saw you under the fig tree. Like

Nathanael, you were under the fig tree that Adam and Eve used to attempt to cover their nakedness. You were alone there, with your shame and your guilt and He saw you.

He *decided* to come after you, lost you. To seek you and to save you, He allowed Himself to be hanged on a tree. Crucified, He demonstrates the depth of His love. "Father, forgive them." His love is never ending. His love is real and present and rich and full of grace. Nathanael was overwhelmed by Jesus' omniscience. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel" (John 1:49). We are overwhelmed by His grace. It is on this altar, His grace. He calls you to eat His body and drink His blood. In eating it, in drinking it, you declare to the world whom you follow. You follow the crucified and risen Savior of the world, who loves you and gave Himself up for you. I gladly follow Him into His death and resurrection. I know you. I know the faith that lives in you. You are so very much like me. I gladly leave behind the vanity of this world and embrace His Word, embrace His church. It *is* radical. And it is beautiful and empowering and it brings joy and peace and hope to the soul. Be assured of this, He has called you and you follow Him. We are Christians. We are followers of Christ the King.