

FOLLOWING  
[written in oral form]

Mark 1:14-20  
Epiphany 4, Year B

January 24, 2021  
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Today's text announces the beginning of Jesus' ministry.  
John the Baptist was arrested, and Jesus jumps in.

Jesus preaches and selects his disciples.  
The recruitment seems accidental, but it is not.

By the shore, he saw Simon Peter and Andrew casting their nets, offshore, in their boats.  
Obviously, they were fishermen.

The famous line, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." seems a bit bizarre.

On the surface, it would be like Jesus walking in right now, and calling to me. "Follow me and I will make you preach to fish."

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If the invitation was out of the blue, then it would be weird.  
*And, who knows, I could be preaching to an aquarium....*

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According to John's Gospel, Simon Peter and Andrew had been followers of John the Baptist.  
So, they knew what to expect and.....they Knew Jesus.

Likely, the same is true with James and John. They also would have known Jesus.

Knowing who you are following is important.

That makes sense, and so does regularly reading the Gospels to make sure we know who Jesus was...which is how God wants us to live and be.

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Going out to catch people seems a bit rude with Our 21st century sensibilities. However, it would have been understood as retrieving / rescuing people from destructive life choices and misinformation.

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Most important is the call / invitation to follow.  
The four were asked to follow Jesus, and they did.

They had to decide to follow, and they did.  
The decision to change direction / to follow is essential.

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"Faith Exploration" is intended to direct "seekers" and those wondering what to do.... to consider that decision.

We are forming a group that will begin meeting in a month or so.  
Often Faith X leads to making that decision to be a follower of Christ and to be baptized.

As Kendra mentioned, two weeks ago, baptism is the public declaration to be a follower of Christ.

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Making a promise in private / in solitude is easy.  
Stating a commitment in public is profound; It is a vow.  
That is why wedding ceremonies are public, too.

When someone is baptized they are asked to declare, "Jesus Christ is Lord", and Lord means your leader.

All the church hears it, and it becomes embedded in one's soul.  
A vow is a reminder that helps sustain us through times of doubt.

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To be sure, the "following" is what this / what life is about.

To follow and not go astray, one needs to be close to the leader and focus on that leader.  
Casual followers can lose track of the leader and become lost.

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For example:  
I've shared before that I had a pet duck when I was in my early teens.  
Ducks are great followers. I could go anywhere, and he would faithfully follow, even along a busy road.  
No leash was needed.  
Of course, as a good leader, I would watch out for hazards, such as dogs.

Dogs,.....are casual followers. They will follow to a point,.. to the point of seeing a squirrel or another dog or cat.  
When that happens, focus and concentration changes, to their new haphazard leader,.....and they could end up hit by a car.

Cats? Never mind..... they follow yarn or anything that moves.

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I think we understand what it means to be a good follower.  
Consider ducks, dogs and cats.

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Moreover, I think following is discipleship. When we follow we mimic the leader; we become more and more like the leader.  
To follow Christ requires we are in tune with God and know about God's way for us..... which Jesus demonstrated.  
The focus is on God, understood through Christ.  
As I said, I think following is discipleship.  
Yes, the church teaches, mentors, inspires and encourages.

Yet, the best learning comes from following.

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I have come to disdain "discipleship training courses."

Over the years, I have been involved in three different ones, and I came to realize they are not so different.

It seems like a new flavour comes out every 10 years or so.

I found them to be similar to military boot camp.

There were rigorous lessons and exercises to do.

Expectations of achievement were high.

The people in the group bonded closely,.... and... they created a sense of accomplishment..... and pious superiority.

Those "in" tended to get frustrated by the lack of commitment by all others. Those who did not take the course felt snubbed.

I do not think such courses are good for a church.

I think we are better off simply encouraging people to follow God's way,.....knowing each has their own cadence.

And, knowing that we are all in this together.

Moreover, God knows who we are.

I do not think God will abandon us.

A Good leader does Not run ahead. A good leader is patient.

A good leader is gracious and nurturing.

A good leader will not lead us into hazards and peril.

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An Old Testament image for this is Psalm 23--the Good Shepherd. A more detailed image is Jesus.

Both are presenting the nature and passion of God.

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So,..... the decision to be a follower.

But first,.....an brief digression:

My Mennonite friends from my youth, for many years, kept telling me I should be a Mennonite. They said that because I was a pacifist.

I knew very little about Mennonites. I assumed Mennonites were followers of some guy named Menno Simons.

I used to joke: Simon says, "Go on voluntary service."

Simon says, "Make something for the potluck."

Simon says, "Pay a tenth of your income."

"Go out and dance with someone."

Ha,.... everyone knows Mennonites do not dance.

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In time, I learned that Mennonite was a given name and not one claimed. We do Not follow Menno.

In 1994, my friends finally convinced me to become a Mennonite.  
We strive to be followers of Christ - the way of God.

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Back to the decision to be a follower.

Truth be told we are all followers. Everyone follows someone or something.

Bob Dylan was right when he sang "You Gotta Serve Somebody."

Everyone is serving / following someone or something.

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Reality, circumstances,...life is shifting under our feet.  
Every day is different. Being stationary is impossible.  
We are on unsteady ground.

We are not astute enough or wise enough to discern a destiny or a direction.  
We are **not god enough** to be independent and free from persuasion..... or from raw survival reflex.

Something / Someone is leading us.

We can be delusional and believe we are in control.  
We can blindly follow our impulses/ our lust and desires.  
Or, **we can choice a leader.**

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Keep in mind, there are many sly demagogues out there.

They will say what people want to hear, and lead followers blindly down a different path.....to a destructive destination.

One such demagogue now resides in Florida.

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There are lots of leader options, including asking the Google search engine to lead.

Consumerism, hoarding and capitalism are nefarious leaders.  
And, there are many other things to follow.

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We must regularly examine what is before us, and make sure we know who / what we are following.

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To those who claim to follow Christ, yet embrace violence and weapons,..... please read the Gospels.

To those who demand conformity and adherence to their own standards and dogma,.....please learn about the way of Christ.

To white people who are **not** fighting against racism, not letting go of power, not working to change systemic injustice,....  
please learn about way of Christ.

To those living out their fear, please learn about Christ.

To those living IN fear and despair,.....God is for you.

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Christ is God's way for us. I could just say God's way, yet the Gospel accounts give us a helpful clarity.

Still, it is God's way.

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From the scriptures and experience, we learn the following:

God's way is the way of peace, justice, grace and love.

God leads us to love and to accept others.

God leads us to peace, to wholeness for all, to be of service for others.

God leads us to instill justice in the system and for individuals.

God leads us in love to love.

God is gracious.

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God invites you and me to follow Christ, the way of God.

This is an invitation to help save and heal the world.

The invitation is Not for our own selfish interest.

God calls us to help retrieve those in destruction, those suffering in anguish and fear.

God invites us to help save and heal the world, and we are part of the world.

God invites us to love.

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Each day, throughout each day, we choose to follow.

**You going to serve somebody.**

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I will leave it there.