

## SERMON FOR JUNE 26TH 2022

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The phrase that I am going to focus on today is “I will follow you wherever you go” from the passage that I just read in Luke. So, the first thing that comes into my brain is the song from the 60’s titled “I Will Follow Him”. Here are some of the lyrics from that song: I love Him, I love Him, I love Him and where he goes I’ll follow; I will follow him, follow him, wherever he may go, there isn’t an ocean too deep, a mountain so high it can keep me away; Ever since he touched my hand I knew that near him I always must be”. Now of course this is sung from a woman’s standpoint about a man that she has fallen in love with and she is off dreaming of being together forever with him. Now if we translate this in a spiritual way (and there are gospel versions of this song) it can be heard as people following Jesus. Whoopi Goldberg did a great job of this song in the movie “Sister Act” How did this woman in the song know? Jesus touched her hand. There was a connection. Jesus would often heal by making a physical connection to others: the putting of mud on the blind man’s eyes who could then see (physically and spiritually). People came to Jesus and followed him due to his healing power. People followed Jesus as they heard about his reputation, had a purpose in seeking him out, often practical and physical such as healing, wanted to learn, wanted to be heard, listened to, accepted, validated and given some hope. Remember that Jesus tended to talk to the marginalized in society at the time. We can’t be directly healed by Jesus himself so what does it take for us to follow Him?

There are a lot of Biblical passages about following God and Jesus, or not following, or questioning what it takes to follow, etc. Questions that we often have today. To follow is a verb which means that it requires action. Take for example the passage from 2nd Kings that we read today about Elisha being persistent about following Elijah, the last of God’s prophets alive who was also being persecuted. Elijah seems hesitant to pass the “mantle” meaning authority, role, responsibility to Elisha and tests

him but Elisha is persistent and, in the end, becomes the next prophet. Elisha clearly wants this. Would we work so hard and follow with such determination as Elisha who knew that his future was at stake? He was different from many of the Old Testament prophets who pleaded with God to not call them to follow Him. Moses was one of those who initially resisted, had lots of questions for God and reasons why he wasn't fit for the job: it goes from a "who am I that I should go?" In other words, I have no qualifications to lead your people out of Egypt. Then it becomes "If they ask me your name I don't know what to tell them" to "What if they don't believe me or listen to me?" to "I am not a good speaker. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue". Moses had every excuse in the book but God had every answer. Never mind that he had fled Egypt as he feared for his life as he killed an Egyptian and was a wanted man there. But Moses followed God's command and the rest is history. Are we able to overcome our doubts, fears and anxiety to follow Jesus?

We can jump to the New Testament where Jesus calls his disciples and they all seem more than willing to follow him, almost blindly. They leave their boats and their livelihood, or they leave a lucrative job of being the tax collector. They don't seem to put up a fuss at all and on what recommendation, what credentials, reference did they have to follow Jesus? If it was me I would be siding with the Old Testament prophets and first put up a stink before I left the comforts of my home, my familiar surroundings to go into the unknown. So, we have a wide variety of responses in the Bible to the call from God to follow him and what that means. Can we so quickly give up all that we have known and follow Jesus, not knowing what lays ahead?

Let's go to the passage today from Luke in which Jesus is approached by someone who wants to follow him and Jesus tells him that it isn't easy as he has no home, no possessions, no sense of physical security or comfort. In other words, the journey is going to be really challenging. It isn't like anything that you have done before. We aren't told the response to what Jesus tells the person. Then Jesus invites someone else to follow him; they respond with wanting to bury someone first, only to be told to not bother with that. The person is to make following Jesus a priority over taking care of the dead as they are already dead. The

person needs to not look back and linger but to look ahead. The last one in this passage is Jesus' invitation to follow him being met with the request to say goodbye to family first. But that isn't ok with Jesus either. Jesus is saying that the person must act immediately as following Jesus is that important. Can we really put Jesus and God first in our lives? For that is what is meant by following Jesus. Jesus clearly has different criteria than the folks in the Bible did and that we do today for what it means to follow him.

So what do we learn from all of this? One, we often don't know what is really entailed with following Jesus and God, that we are often asked to do things that are not only new but unthinkable, challenging, different, and that following is a choice and can be a risky proposition. Jesus is asking us to make a decision to follow him that is not based on the typical questions that we want to answer before we make such a decision. Questions such as: will this benefit me personally? What is the cost benefit ratio? What do I need to give up or change in order to do this? How much time, energy, money, etc. will it take to follow Jesus and for how long? What is the outcome and is it guaranteed? Can I see the contract? What is my part and what is your part? What will I get out of this? Notice that a lot of my questions use the pronoun "I". This is not the language of God. God and Jesus are about us, engagement, working together. The focus is on the whole group, not the individual I.

The positive is that the followers aren't alone. They and we have God with us on this journey. I will often in retrospect give credit to the Holy Spirit for intervening in my life. I know that I am being led to follow Jesus in my life. The other thing is that each of us then and now has our own unique response that can change over time. God doesn't go anywhere. It is up to us to decide if, when and where we want to follow. Jesus is there whenever we say yes to him. We recently went through Pentecost where we remembered Jesus' promise to the disciples and to us that the Holy Spirit is always with us to teach us, to be our guide, companion, and will listen to us and show us compassion and love as we grow. We follow Christ and are led by his teachings. We try to live according to his teachings, the most important being to love one another as

we love ourselves, to love everyone, to love unconditionally, to forgive and to be in unity with others.

So how do we discern what we are to do when we follow? What is God calling us to do? What does Christ's message mean for our lives? It will be different for each of us. This of course may change over time for us. It may come upon you in a moment or it may come to you slowly. You may start out in one direction, only be led to do something very different. My following Jesus to become a licensed minister has been a long time in the making. I have known that the Holy Spirit has been guiding me throughout my life. Mostly something happens that is all too "lucky" but I use the word that God was working in my life. I use the term Holy Spirit instead of luck or chance. An example is when I was wanting to go from part time to full time work as my son was then in kindergarten. I then found myself drawn to being a hospice social worker. Mind you that up till then I had been a social worker in mental health. I had taken one course years before on hospice care but then had moved and didn't use it. I picked up the newspaper for the first time (this was before the time of searching on the internet for jobs) and there was a position for a full-time hospice social worker at the local hospital that was 5 minutes away from my house. The Holy Spirit lined up that job for me. I loved my work in hospice and worked closely with the team which included the chaplain. As hospice workers we often said that when we were with the patients and the families that we walked on holy ground. I did that for 8 years as I followed Jesus. My story goes on and here I am today. I can say that I knew that I was following Jesus as my time in hospice was very meaningful for me. Where have you been led by following Jesus? Is it still fulfilling to you? Do you feel like you are actively following or do you need a booster shot, so to speak? Have you done what you followed Jesus and are now looking to the next step or a new path of growth? For instance, my following Jesus originally led me to hospice, it was only years later that I realized that in part out of that experience that I was being called to ministry as my new way to follow Jesus.

Something else that we can learn from Jesus's call to follow him is that following God for Jesus and us helps us to deal with what life throws our way, even death. Jesus followed his path to Jerusalem, feeling a

sense of urgency as his time was running out. But he kept his focus and continued to be in close communication with the Father. Jesus questioned but he kept going. He knew that he was not alone and that he would be reunited with the Father. We too need to put our focus and therefore our number 1 priority on God in our lives. That will be our call. In Luke we read that Jesus is clearly telling those who question them about his wanting them to follow him that they need to do so with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength (this is from Mark 12:29-30 which is the shema from Deuteronomy which states "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one."). Jesus wants us to follow him with our whole being, with all that we have got, passionately, with gusto, to follow him without looking back, and with a singularity of purpose. For everything then follows from our following of Jesus and God as first in our lives.

Having said that, we don't need to join the next newfangled idea out there. We don't need to follow blindly as we may end up following someone into a blind alley and not be following Jesus after all. We should use our whole body to discern what we see as being asked to do. We need to think it through, sit with it, ponder it in our hearts, listen to our physical body about it. Use your intuition. Listen to the small, still voice in your head. Take that step, draw up a plan, collaborate with others, dream big, think outside of the box, put yourself in someone else's shoes to view the world from their viewpoint. Rely on your faith, pray about it, read about it, listen to God. And then follow Him and enjoy the journey. Happy Trails to you!!! Amen

## **PRAYER OF PASTORAL CARE June 26, 2022**

Our prayer response is God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God of healing and peace, we thank you for life and health, for morning and evening, for rain and sun, for all you give to sustain life; and we thank you for Jesus, who died and rose again to make real the promise of new life, God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We ask, O God, for a church that ministers every day to bring people together in your name, for hearts that will not judge, for minds that

recognize injustice and oppression in all its forms, and for hands that are open to answer your call. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we pray for the healing of the nations. We lift up the people of Ukraine in the losses and tragedy of war, the people of Afghanistan and those in other crisis areas of our world in their need. Silence the wars and experiences of terror that plague the human family. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the leaders and for the Supreme Court of our country. We particularly pray for all women and girls are, and will be impacted by the ruling overturning Roe v. Wade as the law of the land. We pray for the responsibilities and freedoms of parenthood and reproductive health, for motherhood and sisterhood in these days, and in the days and years ahead. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are victims of natural disasters, of drought and flooding, of earthquakes and wild fires. We thank you for all who reach out in aid. Hear us as we pray for all who suffer. Lift the yoke of human pain from the sick, from the hungry, from the grieving. Move the hearts of your people to serve all who are in need. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We offer up in prayer those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

May we live in the love of Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

## **OFFERING**

As Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem to offer himself for the sake of the world, let us offer our tithes and gifts in thanksgiving.

## **\*DOXOLOGY**

## **\*PRAYER**

Take these gifts, O God, for the work and outreach of this church. May they be signs of your love and faithfulness. In the name of the one who gave himself for all people, we pray. Amen.