

Doing What Disciples Do:
“Follow”
Mark 1:14-20

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If my wife puts up with me another five weeks, we will have been married forty-two years. For those of you too young to remember, things have changed. There were no cell phones or text messages forty-two years ago. E-mail and iPods were not even dreamed of. Even land phones were party lines. So, young teenagers in love back then had to find creative ways to communicate. That's where The Cokesbury Hymnal came in. During long sermons in the little church of our childhood, Sandy and I communicated through song titles. For example, I opened the songbook to “I Need Thee Every Hour” and handed it to her. She passed it back opened to “Open My Eyes That I May See.” Encouraged, I replied with “Give Me Your Heart”; she replied with “Almost Persuaded.” Elated, I came back with “O Why Not Tonight?”

There is another standard song in that old Cokesbury Hymnal that is buried deep in my heart. It goes like this:

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, “Christian, follow Me.”*

That's what I want to talk about today!

JESUS CALLS US.

Jesus calls us. It's not Avon calling; it's not Howard calling; it's not even the church calling; Jesus is calling. The word of God incarnate is calling on you. The Son of God knows you by name. The Savior of the world wants you on His team. Jesus is calling. He speaks to our innermost being. He is the One who can give our lives meaning and purpose and He is calling you. Without Him, we will always be wandering. With Him, we will have purpose and power. Through Him our sins are forgiven. With Him, our lives have direction. Jesus is calling.

Jesus calls us “o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea.” That's how Cecil Alexander described it one hundred sixty years ago. I wonder how he would define it now?

Back in the 1960's, the government was funding studies on what Americans would do with all their spare time as a result of technology. But, a 2005 Lou Harris Survey reveals that leisure time for average Americans has shrunk 37% since 1973. Up to fifty percent of physical illness is attributed to stress.

Janet Ruffing writes, “Busyness is a state of mind and a habit of the heart rather than the tasks that need to be accomplished.” We wear it like a badge in America. We say it to one another all the time. So the mantra of America is “keep busy,” for keeping busy creates a sense of power and importance which

covers our loneliness and sadness. On this busy August Sunday—with summer ending, school starting, business booming, life consuming—Jesus calls us. Can we hear His call?

“From each idol that would keep us,” Jesus calls us. Idol worship was a major sin in the Bible. From the time the children of Israel made the Golden Calf in the wilderness, the temptation of God’s people has been, as the Bible puts it, to go “whoring” off after other gods. Idols are statues, poles, towers, rocks. Idols are anything or any body that gets what God deserves. Idol worship is to value something or someone in a way that hinders the love and trust we have in God.

Did you hear about the gentleman who walked into the card shop on Valentine’s Day and asked the clerk to help him find a very special valentine. “Here’s a good one,” said the clerk. It read, “To the one and only love of my life.” “That’s perfect,” said the man, “I’ll take four of them.”

Our problem is that we have too many ultimate loyalties. When we lived in Lexington, Kentucky and had UK basketball tickets, Sandy and I would go down and worship at Rupp Arena. It was probably the most exciting worship service in town. Some of you worship sports; some people worship their children; a few worship a spouse, while others worship work and still others worship money. At whose altar do you bow today? Jesus calls us from the worship of this vain world’s golden store. Whatever stands between God and me is an idol in my life and Jesus calls us from it. The problem is that we have so many ultimate concerns in our lives. We get caught in good, valuable, and meaningful things, but things that keep us away from God. Jesus calls us from the idols that would keep us. Can we hear His call today?

WILL WE FOLLOW?

Several years ago, I stood in the bow of a boat as we motored across the Sea of Galilee, the morning mist blowing across my face. In the distance I could see fishermen coming in from their morning work, sorting fish, tending their nets, working from their boats. I’ll never forget the overwhelming feeling that surged through my soul—this is where it all began—Peter and Andrew, James and John leaving their nets, abandoning their boats and following Jesus. What makes normal, ordinary, business people do that?

TRUST—Incredible Trust.

After I preached a sermon on “In God We Trust” several bankers reminded me of their slogan. “In God we trust, everybody else we audit.” Suspicion is our way of life. We’ve been duped and betrayed too many times. Guilty until proven innocent is our mode of operation. We try people in the court of public opinion. With all the media attention, is it possible for anybody to get a fair trial anymore?

Yet this invisible, but real, divine, yet fully human, Man of history and Savior of the world breaks through our doubts and fears, our skepticism and self-sufficiency saying, “Follow me.” He reaches down into the depths of our hearts and says to us in the innermost parts of our being, ‘Will you trust Me? I know you don’t know everything about Me, but will you trust Me? Will you follow Me?’

Here's the formula—Faith + Hope = **Trust**. Faith comes from personal experience of Jesus as Lord. Hope is reliance on the promise of Jesus. Trust is coming to the conclusion that one thing in life is certain— that is “The Love of Jesus Christ. Jesus loves me no matter what.”

Trust is not based on proof. Trust is rooted in love. I did get the message back in that little country church. Even as I shuffled the hymn book back and forth, thinking about whether or not I could get this girl to like me, somehow, even though I didn't listen to the sermons, it got through. As a kid, I did trust my life to Jesus Christ. It was the smartest thing I have ever done. In so doing I started on an adventure that I could not have even comprehended so long ago. There have been heights of joy that I could not imagine in my wildest dreams. When the sands of time became weary, and the long night dreary, I have discovered but one set of footprints in the sand, because my Lord was carrying me. Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand. But this one thing I absolutely know: “Jesus loves me for the Bible tells me so.” When you know that, all the rest of the questions don't matter much. Will you follow? Jesus calls us. To follow is to act. It takes action to follow.

ACTION

In Verse 18 we read *“At once they left their nets and followed him.”* And then in Verse 20 it says, *“Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.”*

Not everybody responded to Jesus that way. One man said, “I've just bought some land; I must go see it.” Another said, “I have purchased these oxen; I need to try them out.” Yet another said, “I just got married; I can't come.” The rich young ruler had too many riches. We can hesitate making up our minds, but we cannot hesitate making up our lives, for our lives get made up one way or another.

To follow is to make a DECISION. It is to Start Walking.

Today I want to ask you to make a decision, a simple decision, but a profound one—to follow Jesus.

Some of you are old hands at this—keep walking.

Some of you who have just heard Him calling—start walking.

Some of you who are not sure you can trust Him—try it out.

For 50 days would you do these 5 things?

Put God first in my life.

Seek to do what Jesus would do.

Worship at least once a week.

Pray for world peace.

Do some random acts of kindness.

Start now. I want to give you a little card to remind you of your commitment. It has a prayer on it that you can pray every day. Don't wait. Don't hesitate. Jesus is calling. Will you follow?

Amen.