

Follow me

Introduction

I know we have an annual meeting today, so I'm going to do my best to follow the advice of my best counselor and keep my message brief this morning. In fact, I want to focus on just two words from our Gospel passage today: two words that define our identity as Christians, and two words that require a response.

If you remember nothing else today, I hope these two words stay with you, because they name who we are. And I hope they will help frame our time together at the annual meeting after the service, and how we think about St Hugh as a congregation.

Are you ready for them? The two words are: "Follow me". I plan to cue you at various points in the sermon to repeat these two words out loud, just to ensure you haven't forgotten them, like this: (gesture)

Context

In our Gospel text today, we see the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in his message to repent because the kingdom of come has come near. You might get the impression from Matthew's passage alone that Jesus came upon these fisherman, said the two magic words, and out of the blue they just got up and left their fishing business to follow this teacher.

But several of these disciples had already met Jesus, as we heard in Tia's sermon last week.

- They had heard John's proclamation "behold the Lamb of God", and had begun to understand who Jesus was, .
- Andrew and another disciple, perhaps John, had responded to Jesus' invitation to "come and see"
- Andrew went and found his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus.
- Later, Jesus sought out Philip and summoned him to (gesture) "follow me"

By comparing the different gospels, we get a fuller understanding of the relative order of the early events in Jesus' ministry.

- the disciples went with Jesus to a wedding, where he turned water into wine.
- Jesus cleared the temple in Jerusalem.
- Jesus visited Nicodemus at night and explained that "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

All these things happened before that climactic day by the Sea of Galilee, when four fishermen—Peter and Andrew, James and John—were called by Jesus to leave their nets and (gesture) "follow me".

What changed? Why was this now the time for the disciples to follow Jesus?

The text makes clear that the precipitating event was the arrest of John the Baptist.

- John's ministry of preparing the way for Jesus, the Lamb of God, was now complete.
- That marked the transition to
 - Jesus' public ministry,
 - His fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "the people living in darkness have seen a great light"
 - And his message of "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"
- It marked the beginning moment where those who heard Jesus

I don't mean to diminish the drama of those early disciples leaving their livelihoods, and James and John leaving their father, to follow Jesus as their teacher. But I find it helpful to recognize that God had already been at work in these disciples' lives in many ways, preparing them for Jesus' call to discipleship.

Conclusion

What about your own early experience in beginning to follow Jesus?

- It might have been like Andrew, who wanted to know more about Jesus and was invited to "come and see"
- Perhaps your experience was more like Peter: someone else brought you in contact with Jesus and his church.
 - This was my experience as a teenager: my friends from school were active in a youth group and brought me with them. That became my first step toward encountering Jesus.
- Perhaps you had an experience like Philip where Jesus somehow found you.

Whatever the situation, we all reach points in our lives, large or small, where we come face-to-face with Jesus and hear his call to (gesture) "follow me".

- When we hear this call, it confronts us with the question: what will we do? How will we respond?
- Again and again in our lives, we encounter many circumstances where we are challenged to decide, will I follow Jesus?

Following Jesus is fundamentally a matter of our identity. It is **who we are**.

- If I am a follower of Christ, that takes precedence over my family, my nationality, or my politics.
- If I am a follower of Christ, that is more important than my present or past occupations, my interests and hobbies.
- If I am a follower of Christ, that gives a new context to my trials and pains.
- If I am a follower of Christ, that transcends my experience as an Episcopalian, or a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or a Methodist. Despite our differences, we are family together with those who follow Jesus as Lord.

Today in our annual meeting we'll be hearing reports, considering roles and offices, and thinking about the state of St Hugh as we plan for the year ahead. But as we think about

the needs of our congregation, our leadership, our practices and policies, and our building, I hope we will also be considering these things:

- How are we as a congregation responding to the call of Jesus?
- If our primary identity is followers of Jesus, are there others around us who need to hear His call to (gesture) “follow me”?