

Wm. Blake Spencer

That We Should Follow

Matthew 4: 12- 22

No matter what season of life we find ourselves....we typically gravitate to set patterns, routines, and habits. The morning alarm awakens me. I turn it off, walk to the thermostat and bump up the heat, let the dogs out, turn on the coffee pot, find the remote control to turn on Good Morning America, fill the dog dishes with fresh water and food, let the dogs back in because they don't take that long these past mornings –

because they're not accustomed to snow and ice, pour my cup of coffee, wrap up in a blanket on the couch to hear the morning news and exchange texts with my daughter as she prepares for school.

I'm not obsessive about this morning routine....but pretty consistent because these are things I simply must accomplish.

There are other routines in life....jobs for instance. With jobs we have schedules, deadlines, agendas, quotas, set expectations, evaluations....and whether or not our job requires a fairly rigid routine.....day in and day out....we still are prone to creating familiar patterns.

A pastor friend of mine once said, "Some days I wish I worked in a bottle cap company.

I show up at my station and one at a time, for the duration of the work day, I pick up a bottle cap out of a big wooden bin and place it on a conveyor belt, and when the whistle blows I pack up my stuff and go home where I do not have to spend one second thinking about my job because I know that exactly what will be waiting for me tomorrow. "

What she is longing for is concise expectations....which does not always come with ministry. Things happen at hours we have no control of and at any given minute we must be ready.

Many of our jobs come with this reality....where we must greet and meet the unexpected at any given moment.

But I've found that even with the ever present potential for the unexpectedit is still possible to create set patterns and habits day after day.

All of this to say, that our brothers, Andrew and Peter were doing just this. They were doing what they did most every day. Casting a net out into the sea....to catch fish....to provide for their family.

We can only imagine the scene just prior to the Gospel lesson. "Mornin' Peter." "Hey, Andrew, Good morning to you." "Did you have time to fix that hole in the net last night." "Yep, got it done."

"You ready to go to the water?" "Suppose so." "Where did you put the tackle box?" "Where I put it every day Andrew. If it were a snake it would bite you." "What's up with you today?" "Don't ask."

So off they go, expecting nothing more than catching some fish and doing what they do day in and day out.

But this day would be different. They just didn't know it yet. This day their routine would radically change.

We really don't have to go any further to discover how this familiar story in Matthew's gospel intersects with ours. It's not that complicated. It only takes three sentences and we are left

frozen in our tracks wondering what we would have done if we had been the ones....doing what we do every day.... when Jesus shows up and says what he says.

I'm mean for gosh sakes, Jesus doesn't even bother to offer a proper greeting....he just goes for the whole enchilada. No "good morning", or "how are you".

It is as if he appears out of nowhere. The brothers barely have time to look up and Jesus' first words are, "Follow me." It's not a question....it's an invitation with expectation. "Follow me."

But, I..... I want to know where the questions are. Why don't we hear questions! Simple questions? Didn't these two brothers have questions? Like: And you are? And you want us to follow you where? And what are we going to get out of this?

And after a moment.....after they have had the slightest amount of time to consider the proposal I would expect some other questions: Do we have time to go back home and pack a few things? Perhaps we might need to tell our family where we are going off to....because I'm thinking they're going to be expecting us to come back with today's catch. Oh.....and....why us? Why do you want us to follow you?

But in the story we inherit....there's not one question. All we're told is that they immediately dropped their nets and followed. They immediately....without question, without hesitation, doubt or anything else....stop what they're doing and follow.

Just as if they had won the Galilean lotto....they quit their jobs and go....without even taking the time to hold that big check and be interviewed and gawked at by all the other people wishing they could win the lotto and get the heck out of this one fish town.

I'm thinking even if the brothers didn't have questions in that moment.....surely their family did. Can you imagine their family and what takes place later that day when they don't come back home? Imagine the panic as they run out to the lake and find only the nets where they had been dropped? Surely they had to wonder and worry.

I don't know about you..... but this story leaves me with questions and not just questions about the brothers and their response....but questions about me and my response....because honestly I wasn't and mostly am not immediate in my response when the words of invitation come my way.... "Follow me Blake." Ok....but wait...I have a few questions first!

I don't know....maybe I just talk more than Peter and Andrew.

What I do know is that I uttered more than a few words before I dropped what I was doing....before I finally came to terms with what it meant to be a member of Christ's church....what it meant to actively participate in the various ministries of the church.

And to be honest, I'm still asking questions...I'm still wondering what it all means....and I still have doubts as to why Jesus looks me in the eye and calls out my name and invites me to follow.

Lord....who am I, that you should want me to follow?

Rob Bell provides some insight into this disciple inviting.....especially in light of the things we wonder about ourselves....like: if we are good enough, smart enough, loving enough, ready enough.

He speaks in the context of Jesus being a Rabbi, a teacher.....and reminds us that in that day the young men who had proven potential for "academia " were sent off to sit at the

feet of learned Rabbi's to think and learn and perhaps become Rabbi's themselves one day.

Bell suggests those like Peter and Andrew, who did not have perceived aptitude to become learned teachers remained in their villages to do what was necessary for the every day sustenance of life.....like fishing.

In other words, Jesus did not seek out the perceived brightest and best of the day with the hopes of creating an elite circle of disciples known for their intelligence and prestige. His agenda was simple. Follow me. There are no pre-requisites. Just plain and simple.....Follow me. Ordinary folks with ordinary stories. Follow me.

And they followed.

And, we know more of the story. We know that even though Andrew and Peter followquestions eventually were asked.... they and the other disciples were full of them. And sometimes when they assumed what Jesus was doing and missed the point.....Jesus turned to them with questions.

I imagine the disciples wanted simple black and white answers to their questions and didn't much like being questioned. We're pretty much the same. We prefer to hold all the questions in our pockets....and we consistently wait for clear and concise answers.

But the truth is.....we are not given exact explanations. And as much as we want to reduce this call to follow into a bumper sticker response.....scripture teaches us that faith is much fuller and richer than trite teachings and one liners. But that doesn't stop us from trying.....

Oh how we love our bumper sticker theology....

Honk if you love Jesus.

The Bible Says It. I believe it. That settles it.

Love the sinner, hate the sin.

I love Jesus. I just don't like his followers.

But despite our fascination with the trite....with the easy to understand....with faith that can be contained and easily managed...with the desire that God only deal with us in pre-selected ways of our choosing....the invitation Jesus offers.....is nothing of the sort.

When we finally drop our nets.....and walk away from what we are doing day in and day out....when we finally look up and see that the One calling us knows us and loves us more fully than we can know and love ourselves....that's when our questions and expectations fade into trust and willingness to follow.

This we know....God's Spirit will call us and meet us in unexpected ways at unexpected times. We will most likely be in the middle of an ordinary, even monotonous routine....maybe even in a rut....but the same story will unfold again....the same story that took place on the shores of the Galilee. Jesus looks us in the eye and calls us by name and invites us to follow.

We my friends are in the same boat.....and that's the gift. We have each other....to hold on to....to ask our questions and ponder God's answers.

We have each other....to accomplish ministry....which at times seems more ominous than in one of us can handle.

We have each other as Christ is among us giving us wisdom to walk into healing, and comfort to bear our grief....and joy enough to look each other in the eye and call each other by name....speak words of encouragement and offer words of invitation.

We have each other as we are invited to take the risk to follow in the way of Christ. We have each other.

It's not about knowing all the answers it's about listening to each other's questions and stories.

It's not about pre-requisites and agendas....it's about discovering the width and depth of God's love revealed in both our strengths and weaknesses.

We are all in the same boat.....having been invited to follow.

So let us journey together.

Stop what you are doing. Stop it.

And hear.....and receive the love and the life that only God can give.

In the name of the one who came not to be served but to serve.

Amen and Amen.