

## Sermon Second Sunday after Epiphany 2018

January 14, 2018

John 1:43-51

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for our mediation this morning is the Gospel Lesson previously read. Amen.

**Follow Me.** Two simple words. Follow me. Come after me. Hear what I have to say. Follow me where I have to go, as I do what I have to do. Follow me.

What we see in these two words is the call from Jesus. The call to go where He is going. The call to do what He is doing. The call of God in the flesh. Follow Me.

As we hear these words, we hear them in the midst of the Epiphany season. The season where we celebrate that Jesus is the Epiphany of God; that He is God in the flesh, manifest, revealed. And we see that here, don't we? After all, this is pretty miraculous when we really take a step back and think about it, isn't it? By that I mean, we don't know the circumstances of Philip agreeing to follow Jesus. We don't know if he was one of the disciples in John mentioned just before this passage, when John points to Jesus and tells two of his disciples that Jesus is in fact the Lamb of God. We don't know if he had seen Jesus baptized. We don't know if Philip had even seen Jesus before this. Obviously, we're not supposed to know. Obviously, it doesn't really matter, does it? Because no matter Philip's acquaintance with Jesus, when Jesus says those words, "**Follow Me,**" Philip responds by doing what? He does just what the words say and follows Jesus. Not only that, but he goes and tells Nathanael. He tells Nathanael, "**We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.**" He tells Nathanael, "We have found the Messiah! We have found the Christ!"

And Jesus shows Himself again to be God. After a short discourse with Nathanael, what does Nathanael say? "**Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!**" Of course, their discourse is interesting isn't it? We have this odd interaction where Jesus says something He shouldn't rightfully know. He says, "**Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**" And Nathanael understandably says, "How would you know that?" "**How do you know me?**" And Jesus says most interestingly, "**Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**" Now, we don't know why this strikes Nathanael so deeply. We don't know why he responds with a confession of faith. By that I mean, we don't know if Nathanael did something under a fig tree that would have been known only to him. We don't know if Nathanael had a particular attachment to a fig tree,

or once said a prayer asking God to help him when He was under a fig tree. We just don't know. We know that in the tradition of the Rabbis, some saw studying under a fig tree a pious thing to do. We know that the only tree other than the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life mentioned in the Garden was a fig tree, because we know Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves. But we don't know why this was so pertinent for Nathanael. It doesn't matter, because Jesus does. And He called Nathanael.

And He calls you too. **Follow Me.** You come after me. You go where I go, you hear what I teach. You do what I do.

Now as I say this to you, we have to ask how Jesus does this. How does He call you? I say this because we have the story of Samuel and Eli in the Old Testament lesson. We have that story that many of you are probably familiar with all the way back to Sunday School. It's one of the stories I even remember from being a kid, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. There is Samuel in the temple and the Lord calls to him. At first he thinks it's Eli, but Eli figures out it's God. And then Samuel hears from God. Now, I say this because, as Samuel answers, Eli tells him to say, "**Speak, Lord, for your servant hears,**" and I can remember hearing then and as I got older the instruction based on these words to listen for that voice of God, to listen for God calling me. But where was I directed to listen to God? In my heart. I was directed to listen to how God moved me inside of me, in the voice of my heard, or inside me in my heart. Have you heard it applied that way?

I'm sure I've mentioned before that this is extremely common in our day. In fact, you just turn on a Hallmark movie or even the Muppets, what do they tell you? You have to listen to your heart. In fact, God is even taken out of the equation, because it doesn't matter, you're told to listen to your heart over and above anything else, so it reigns supreme. But do you have any guarantee that God speaks to your heart? Does God promise to speak to your heart? Does Jesus say, "You'll know I'm calling you because you'll feel it in your heart?" No! He says the heart is the source of all sorts of sin: evil thoughts, murder, adultery. Jeremiah tells us that the "**heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.**"

So, how does He call us? He calls us through His Word. "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**" He promises to speak, to call in that Scripture. To call by that Man of God, by the Pastor given to you to speak that Word. He calls you in His Waters of Baptism, where He washes your sin, where He gives you His Holy Spirit, where He cleanses you for His Kingdom. He

calls you in these external things that you would know for sure what His will is for you; that you would not have to wrestle with the darkness of your own heart and sin, but rest in the light of His Word. As Peter says, we have the prophetic word, the word more sure than his experience at the Transfiguration, the word **“to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.”** So this is how He calls us, through His Word.

And as I say that, we should also ask to what does He call us? I’ve been saying, He calls us to go where He goes, to do what He does, to hear what He teaches, but what does that even mean? What does it mean when He says, **“Follow Me?”** Well, I think we can start by thinking of the Exodus from Egypt. Do you remember what happened in the Exodus? When the Israelites left Egypt what did they leave? They left their bondage to slavery under the rule of Pharaoh. They left the abuse that they had to endure. And as they left, where did they go? They followed where the Lord led them. The Lord led them in the Pillar of Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night. He led them and they followed. He led them through their baptism in the Red Sea. He led them on their journey through the wilderness. He led them while they wandered, all the while feeding them with manna. He led them until the day when they crossed through the Jordan into the Promised Land. In other words, He led them into their redemption and freedom from slavery to their Land promised to be filled with good things, with milk and honey; the land where they would be enslaved to no one.

I think I’ve said this before, but do you see the parallel to the Christian life? We are baptized, washed in freedom, cleansed of the slavery of our bondage under the abuse of sin, death, and the devil. We are led by Jesus out of these things. Granted we are led into a strange place, because we are still here with these things all around us. We’re here where there are still temptations. We’re here where there are still trials, where we still suffer illness, and pain, where we lose our loved ones to death. And in the midst of that we have a draw to return to unfaithfulness, to return the bondage of sin, just like the Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt. As I say that, do you remember that? Here the Israelites had been freed from their slavery, and yet what did they say? Every once in a while they would ask why God took them out of slavery? They would complain about the same provision day after day, about not having the seasonings and food they had before. They would complain that they didn’t feel like they were getting anywhere. But did they give thanks that they weren’t getting beaten still? Did they give thanks that they weren’t being forced to labor for someone else? To have to give up their children and have them killed by the Egyptians? No! And this is us isn’t it?

But Jesus has called us to this redemption. And as I say this, I think this passage in I Corinthians 6 describes it so well, what this looks like: **“do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”** So often we think that what we do in the body has spiritual bearing. How we interact with something like food, or how we use our bodies for sexual immorality. But even this body has been redeemed, has been purchased by Jesus from our sin. And as we live in it, there are temptations that come to misuse it, to use it for sin, but those temptations are a draw to return to the bondage of our slavery.

But Jesus says, **“Follow Me.”** He says, **“Follow Me** into death, because when you have died with me, you will rise again. **Follow Me** into my tomb, where your sins will be buried. **Follow Me** to my resurrection that first Easter. **Follow Me** to ascend and be with our Heavenly Father. **Follow Me** to join me in reigning in the eternal Kingdom, where you will be with me, body and soul eternally.”

Yes, Jesus calls you to follow Him. As He does this, it maybe sounds like a command. It maybe sounds like a burden. And there are those times in this life where it's very easy to think it's better in the life under sin. But none of this is true. As He calls you to follow Him in the waters of baptism, to hear His Word and follow Him through the desert, He is truly giving you the greatest invitation of all: the invitation to His eternal Kingdom. And as He is the God in the flesh revealed in Epiphany, there is no better invitation to hear or to heed. Amen.