

## EPIPHANY THREE, YEAR A, JANUARY 22, 2023

There is a song called *Summons* written by John Bell & Graham Maule whose first verse goes like this:

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

The gospel this morning is usually referred to as the call of the disciples. Jesus calls Simon and his brothers and tells them to come follow him and he will make them fish for people. It's a simple message but an important one that we all need to hear because this is not just an ancient story about the call of the disciples. This is not just a story about them and the decision they made. Rather this story is for all of us. This story is about our call to be disciples of Jesus and the decision we have to make.

You know for Christianity to be valuable it must be a living faith not something that was in the past that we look at nostalgically. Jesus isn't standing just by the Sea of Galilee but standing right here and looking each one of us in the eye and asking us will we follow him. Will we be his disciples. Will we take his teachings, his compassion, mercy and his love into our hearts so that we cannot live without him. Basically, to follow Jesus means will you let Jesus change you, touch your heart, open up your soul and empower you to be his agent in the world. Bottom line, that's what it means to be a Christian and the question, will you follow me, is really the reason for us to be here this morning.

Sometimes we think that following Jesus is about giving up everything we know, do or are. But if you look at the call of these disciples, Jesus did not invite them to abandon who they were; he invited them to become their most authentic, God-ordained selves. He invited them to live into the fullness of the God-given image they were born with. When Jesus called these tried-and-true fishermen to follow him, they understood the call not as a directive to leave their experience and intelligence behind, but to bring the best of their core selves forward — to become even more fully and freely themselves.

However, when it comes to answer the call follow me it's not enough to just say I believe. Following Jesus is more than believing. Yet, some think that being a Christian is all about believing who gets into heaven and who doesn't and who is saved and who isn't. Or if you believe the right things you're saved and if you don't you're not. In that way of thinking Christianity is just some sort of right belief. Christianity doesn't come in a pre-packaged, cookie-cutter shape we have to squeeze ourselves into. If we're going to follow him at all, we have to do it within the unique details of the lives, communities, cultures, families, and vocations we find ourselves in. We have to trust that God prizes our intellects, our memories, our backgrounds, our educations, our skills, and that God will multiply, shape, and bring to fruition everything we offer up to God from the daily stuff of our lives. "I will make you," Jesus tells the fishermen. In other words. I will cultivate, deepen, magnify, purify, protect, and perfect the person God created you to be.

What this comes down to is that believing is important but it's not discipleship. The other truth is that Jesus didn't talk much about heaven or what happens after we die or who gets into heaven or what you have to believe. He did a little bit but he really wasn't interested in life after death rather in this life and building God's kingdom on earth right

here and now. He didn't ask Peter and James to believe in him but to follow him. What exactly does that mean.

Here's a story that illustrates this point. It's about a man named George who had a dream, a vision that he could walk across Niagara Falls on a high wire with a wheelbarrow loaded with bricks. So, the man began to train for his dream by stringing a rope between two poles in his back yard. When he was able to run back and forth fairly efficiently, he graduated to a high wire. Meanwhile George's neighbor Frank became very curious as to what he was doing. When he heard George's explanation, he became his biggest supporter and promoter. Soon George was on the high wire with an empty wheelbarrow running back and forth across the wire with ease. As George became more and more proficient, he filled the wheelbarrow with bricks and he soon realized his dream was within his grasp. So, Frank called all the major newspapers and TV stations to be present on the big day. When the day arrived, it was a pretty windy day but George was determined to fulfill his dream. As George stood perched with his wheelbarrow to head across the high wire he looked down at Frank and asked him, "Do you really believe I can do this." Frank, without hesitation yelled back, "You bet I do." George looked out again at the wire strung across the Falls and felt another gust of wind tilt his wheelbarrow precariously. He looked down at Frank again and asked a second time, "Do you believe without a shadow of a doubt that I can do this?" And Frank replied, "I absolutely believe you; you can do this." "Good," answered George, "Get in the wheelbarrow I forgot the bricks."

Will you be my disciple – will you do more than just believe in me. Will you get in the wheelbarrow with me. Will you risk your life just like he did to love a suffering world. To follow Jesus is to imitate his ways; care about the things he did. It's about walking with Christ in your heart and on your lips.

When Jesus says follow me we need to say yes to shining the light of Christ to others. It's not about cajoling manipulating, trapping, bullying, or even persuading others to "accept" Jesus, or join our religion. It is God alone who makes the vision of God's kingdom come alive in a human soul. All we can do is embody the vision and shine the light of Christ for them.

Jesus came to call people. "Fish for people." Especially those who are caught in the nets of exploitation, corruption, poverty, war, exile, homelessness, violence, disease, climate change, racism, sexism, homophobia... the list goes on and on and on. Ask yourselves what would count as Good News for them? How can we shine the light of Christ for them to see they are loved and included. We are called to follow and to be reconcilers, justice healers, peacemakers, bridge builder's, lover of souls or whatever we can be for others. This is the work of discipleship. What we do doesn't have to be on a grand scale to be effective. It's everyone doing their part right where you are planted. Maybe it's volunteering, taking care of someone, raising money or stocking food for pantries. It's doing what you are capable of doing.

Jesus doesn't need admirers or spectators, he needs followers. There are a lot of admirers of Jesus but what Jesus wants is followers. What will you do to follow Jesus?

There is a story about Mother Theresa who would go into the homes of the poor and destitute and she would clean their houses, wash their clothes, and give them baths. One time while visiting an old man who lived alone in a darkened room, she asked him for permission to clean his home. At first, he refused, but at last she convinced him to

allow her to do it. While she was cleaning, she found a very beautiful old lamp, covered with dirt and dust. "Do you not light the lamp?" she asked him. "For whom?" he replied. "Nobody comes here. I never see anybody. Nobody comes to me. I don't need to light the lamp." "If the sisters come to you, will you light the lamp?" Mother Teresa asked. "Yes, I'd do it!" he answered. After that day, the sisters would go to visit him, and he would light the lamp. Years later, the old man asked the sisters to deliver a message to Mother Teresa: "Tell my friend, the light she lit in my life is still burning!"

Jesus is asking us each today will you follow me. It doesn't take much to follow Jesus. We don't have to be a saint or Mother Theresa, we only have to be willing to carry his light into the world and use it to brighten the lives of others.

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Amen.