

## Follow-ship

Mark 1:14-20

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

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Christ the King Lutheran Church

January 25, 2015

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One of the shows currently on my Netflix binge-watching queue is “30 Rock”—one of the great shows that came and went where we were living overseas. I’ve gotten up to Season 2 so far, and early in this second season there is a scene when Alec Baldwin’s character Jack Donaghy gives an award to Tina’s Fey’s character Liz Lemon. It’s an award from NBC’s parent company, the GE Follow-ship award.

After some jokes about the confusion of this award with a leadership award or some sort of fellowship grant, Jack says again that it is the annual follow-ship award. It’s the award, he says, that recognizes the person who exemplifies being a follower. At first, she doesn’t like the award—“I’m no follower, Jack, I’m a leader,” she says. To which he adds, did I mention this award comes with \$10,000, to which she turns to the camera and says “I accept this award on behalf of followers everywhere.”

There is some truth to this, isn’t there, particularly in our own culture. We hold up leadership as such a virtue, such a noble calling, but we’re more likely to make jokes about follower-ship. And it’s true, we need leadership in so many places in our world, in our life. We need leaders in government, leaders in education, leaders in the church on every level. But we also need good followers, those who listen for the voice of God calling them, those who trace the footsteps of Jesus and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, follow him into his mission, boldly going where they have not yet gone, or humbly doing again and again those things to which the followers of Jesus have always been called.

It is interesting to note that there are different ways that the four gospels talk about the twelve who follow Jesus most closely. Often, they’re referred to as disciples, which simply means students, learning from a particular teacher. Other times they are called Apostles, literally the sent-out-ones, sent on a mission both during and after Jesus’ own ministry. The gospel of John, which we heard from last week, emphasizes the fact that they are called to be Jesus’ witnesses, testifying to him as the way, the truth and the life. The gospel of Mark, on the other hand, tends to refer to them primarily as followers. It emphasizes their followship—that they follow, how they follow.

Think again of our gospel reading today, Mark’s simple telling of Jesus calling his disciples—his followers. According to Mark, Jesus saw two pairs of fishermen working along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, simply called out to them “follow me,” and immediately they left what they were doing and followed.

He called, they followed. Simple as that.

We don’t know why exactly Simon, Andrew, James, John, and others felt compelled at that very moment to leave their homes and families to follow Jesus right when he called them. Did they know him already? Was this their first contact with him? We don’t really know. But Mark makes sure we know that they reacted immediately—one of Mark’s favorite words in this part of the gospel—dropping everything to

follow Jesus into an uncertain future, not knowing exactly where it would lead.

He called, they followed. Simple as that. Or maybe it's not that simple....

Now, as far as we can tell, these were just ordinary guys; fishermen, probably owner-operators of a fishing business, rather than day laborers, since the "hired men" are mentioned, too. Jesus didn't do background checks to see if they were qualified to be his followers in any particular way. And we know all too well that his disciples were anything but perfect. Many times they misunderstood him. They often hesitated to follow him, even after having been called. Peter denied him; Judas betrayed him to death. But these would be the persons who would continue Jesus' work on earth after he left-- ordinary people, like you and me. They were called.

And you see, we believe that God calls each one of us, too. We often speak of "God's call" too narrowly, as if God "calls" people only into ordained ministry—or only calls them away from what they have been doing before. But, as Bishop Lull reminded us last week, God's call is not limited to clergy, we all have a vocation, a calling from God. And, God's call does not always involve picking up and leaving our life behind. In fact, as the Bishop challenged us last week, sometime the more difficult calling is in fact to stay where we are AND open ourselves up to something or someone new. God calls every single one of us—calls us where we are, calls us as we are.

True, sometimes Jesus' call invites us to leave something behind—family or friends, a certain way of doing things, a project or program that has been near and dear to our hearts, a manner of praying or a style of worship, a particular role that feels comfortable and familiar. But at the same time, Jesus calls us *to* new things, too. New relationships, new ways to pray and praise, new roles. Behold, Jesus says, I make all things new, And we follow because we know that Christ is the way.

Think, too, of the particular words Jesus uses to call these four fishermen. "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." In calling them to follow, he acknowledges who they are already, what their gifts are, what they're good at. His call will change them, to be sure; but he is not calling them to be something completely different that who they have been created to be. To the fisherman he says, follow me and we'll fish for people. Perhaps to the nurse, he says, follow me, let's bring healing and wholeness to people. To the construction worker he might says, follow me, let's build the kingdom of God. To the accountant he says, follow me, let's put our resources to work, multiply our assets for God's mission. To the choirmaster he says, follow me, let us minister in music together, let us sing to the lord as long as we live. To each and every one of us—and to our collective identity as a congregation, Jesus calls out "Follow Me."

He calls, we follow. Simple as that.

I'd like to accept this challenge on behalf of followers everywhere. AMEN