

“What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?”

Mark 1:14-20

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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When a person joins this congregation, we ask them: Do you desire to be part of this community as together we strive to follow Jesus?

While it's not long or particularly complicated, it is a really big question.

And for some people it may be an unexpected question. After all, if you listen to it, it isn't about what you believe. Rather than requiring questions of belief or doctrine, rather than having someone affirm a creed, we ask a question that at its heart is about two things: relationship and action.

Do you desire to be part of this community? That's the first part of the question. Have you found people here who you would like to accompany you on your faith journey? Have you found people here who you feel like you could trust to walk with you, to encourage you, to hold you accountable, to learn and grow alongside you? Have you found people in this faith community with whom you want to be in relationship as you continue your journey of life and faith? That's where the question starts - with relationship.

And then the second part of the question is about what we will do together. Do you desire to be part of this community as together we strive to follow Jesus? That's the action. Are you coming to be part of this community in order that you can live and work and grow and change and give and serve in the ways of Jesus? Are you ready to not only say you believe something about Jesus, to not only say you love Jesus, but are you ready to shape your life so that what you do and who you are reflects what Jesus did and who he was? That's really at the heart of the second part of the question. The question begins with relationship and ends with a commitment to action, to living like Jesus, which means it is a commitment to make a difference.

Of course today we read Mark's telling of the calling of the first disciples. This is a story where Jesus issues an invitation to two different pairs of brothers, an invitation that is, at its heart, about entering into relationship and living in Jesus' ways. It is an invitation that gets summarized with a simple, yet complex, proposal - follow me.

So, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

We might especially wonder this as we read this story. After all, we are given no background that tells us how much Simon and Andrew, James and John, even knew about Jesus. We are simply told that “after John [the Baptist] was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God” (Mark 1:14, NRSV).

Now, if you are reading this in your Bible, you might notice that between verses 15 and 16 there is an extra return - a blank line - between those paragraphs. Because the Bible isn't a history book concerned with reporting an exact timeline of events, we don't know how much time passes between Jesus beginning to "proclaim the good news" and this day when he walks along the sea and invites some fishermen to a new type of fishing.

But, especially with that extra space separating those two paragraphs, we often like to think that there was probably some span of time when Jesus was doing ministry, when people were becoming aware of him, that had passed before this day. We make some assumptions, ones that feel pretty safe, thinking that likely Simon and Andrew, James and John had met Jesus before, had heard him preach, knew a little of what he was about. Perhaps they'd even had a chance for one-on-one conversations. Maybe he had gone out in the boat with them for a night of fishing. Maybe he had been a guest in their homes and they had shared a meal.

We don't actually know. And maybe, because we aren't the sort of people who would up and leave everything that we know when a stranger walked by and invited us, maybe we just need to believe that they had more of a sense of who Jesus was than Mark tells us. But, we can't help but think it was likely the case.

But even then, what do you think they were signing on for? When Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:17), what do you think they heard?

And when we say, "Do you desire to be part of this community as together we strive to follow Jesus?"...what do you hear? What does it mean to follow Jesus?

The reality is that we might all hear some different things. And that's okay, that is part of life - sometimes we have to figure things out as we go along. In fact, over the next several weeks in worship we are going to explore some aspects of what it might mean to follow Jesus.

But, I wonder if there are some clues in this passage today that can get us started thinking about this question.

Perhaps we start back with what Mark tells us Jesus was saying.

"The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15, NRSV) - God's realm is not far off, but is coming into our very presence. Look for it. Watch for it. Be part of it. Choose God's ways rather than the ways of the empire.

"Repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15, NRSV) - Turn away from the things that distract you from God's intention, be willing to change your way of thinking, embrace the reality of belovedness for you and for everyone else.

“I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:17, NRSV) - This is about relationships. People matter. The outcome of living like Jesus, of following Jesus, is drawing others toward you, not because of you but because you make living in God’s realm seem desirable.

And there is something else...something we often overlook because it doesn’t come out of the mouth of Jesus. At the very beginning of our reading we heard that John was arrested and that when that happened, Jesus picked up the mantle and continued his work.

Friends, that means that “Jesus embraces his ministry from the start as a dangerous ministry, since he is repeating the message of one who was just notoriously arrested” ([Left Behind and Loving It: Dangerous Succession](#)). We don’t necessarily like to acknowledge that. We have cleaned up and sanitized what it means to follow Jesus. But, if we are doing it right, it will likely ask us to risk something, to give up something, even to enter into dangerous territory as we stand for the values and priorities of God’s realm.

So, what does it mean to follow Jesus? It means that we will keep learning and growing and changing and striving as we listen to God’s heart, as we shift our priorities, as we risk ourselves for the good of others, as we claim again and again that there is room at the table and in God’s heart for everyone.

Friends, following Jesus is not a simple thing. But it is an invitation that we are given...to follow Jesus today, tomorrow...to follow Jesus in the big and little moments...to follow Jesus when our doing so matters to others and when no one even notices...to follow Jesus that with him we might help bring God’s kingdom in its fullness. May it be so.