

“FOLLOW ME”

Epiphany 3, Year A - January 22, 2017

Fr. Ben Hankinson

Follow Me. Today's Gospel presents a pattern of discipleship that is beautiful in its simplicity and profound in its impact. Follow me. Two simple words. Two life-changing words.

There are three phases of this process. First, Jesus finds those who he seeks. Jesus isn't standing on the shore waiting for Simon and Andrew to approach him. He walks right up to them and says to them: Follow me.

Next, there is the promise, and I will make you fishers of men. He does not ask that they perfect themselves or even that these professional fishermen should make themselves fishers of men. But it is Jesus who does the making. Jesus who does the transforming.

Which leads us to the third part, the response, the moment of decision. Do Simon and Andrew follow Jesus? We know from the Gospels that of course they do. We know that in their willingness to say yes to the call to follow Jesus that they are indeed transformed into fishers of men. And we know that in that transformation, Jesus begins the process on display today anew in the next generation of the church.

Its simplicity is astounding, and yet this model has changed the face of the world. Jesus took those who were unfit and unprepared for the work of the kingdom and he walked with them. He talked with them. He shaped them over time and many miles of life together. He disciplined them, and in so doing showed them and us how to be disciplined and how to disciple others as well.

Think of your own life. Did you seek Jesus out or did he find you? We can give ourselves a little too much credit in this department sometimes, when in truth he comes to us. He comes to us in the Word. He comes to us in other Christians. He comes to us in the waters of Baptism before we even know how to rightly ask for him. Jesus comes to us and seeks us out, asks us to follow him.

And like the apostles before us, Jesus does the heavy lifting. He does not expect perfection from us, but he provides the opportunity for continued growth in holiness and righteousness by the power of the Spirit at work within us. He walks with us, talks with us, teaches us, heals us, loves us so that he may change us to be more like him. He disciplines us through the Scriptures and the Sacraments, through those who are spiritual mothers and fathers in the faith. He shapes us by his grace.

And all that is left for us is to respond to that grace. Time and again he comes to us, awaiting our return to him and to his path for us. Not willing to settle when we wander away, he constantly places before us signposts of the kingdom, reminders of his enduring love, reminders of cross.

And as we are shaped by this pattern, formed more closely to resemble our Lord and Savior he sends us out to continue the work of discipleship. To be Christ to others so that we can say to them, follow me as I follow Christ. Walk with me as I walk with Christ. And in time, go out with me as we are Christ to the world.

Follow me. Two simple, beautiful, life-changing words. Not only for Simon and Andrew, not only for you and me. Words for the world to live by. Words of eternal life. Amen.