

In the day when most traveled by train, there was a physically disabled boy who ran a small newsstand in a railroad station. Each day he sold candy, gum, and newspapers to people who passed through the station. One day two men rushed through the crowded station to catch a train that was to leave in minutes. One man was 10 to 15 yards in front of the other. The first man turned a corner, ran into the boy, and knocked him from his seat. Candy, gum, newspapers, and change scattered everywhere. The man spoke harshly to the boy, and then went on his way.

Seconds later the other man arrived at the scene. He gently helped the boy up, made sure he was all right, and then collected the scattered belongings. He took out his billfold and gave the boy some money to cover any lost change or the expense of any item broken in the spill. Then he picked up his suitcase and hurried to catch the train that was about to depart. As he hurried down the track, the boy cupped his hands to his mouth and called, "Hey, mister! Are you Jesus?" The man replied, "No, I am simply one of His followers who is trying to do what He would do if He were here."

We often ask, WWJD...What would Jesus Do. No doubt as Christians, we want to Follow Him and do the Christian Thing and live the Christian life that we are expected to live.

We sometimes interpret Jesus' words "Follow me" in a way that is too small and restrictive. We tend to make them only about the church, the religious institution, and a particular way of life. Outside of religion, we can also use the words "Follow Me" to reflect our everyday life.

"Follow me" is Jesus' invitation to every one of us to step into the fullness of our life? What if it is the call to become fully alive? What if it's about, living with integrity, and discovering our true selves? Have you ever had the feeling that you just had to do something even though you didn't exactly know where it would take you or what would happen?

As most of you know, my sister Alene passed away a couple of days ago. When I was 18 and newly married, I needed a job. She was a legal secretary and called me and said there were some lawyers in her building that needed a secretary. I knew virtually nothing about the law or being a secretary. She asked me if I was interested and she said "Follow me in my career" and so I did.

A few years later, she called me and told me she was purchasing a Fast Food Drive In, and would I like to join her in a new career. She said, "Follow Me" and so I did. And that included following her in a Restaurant business.

It wasn't but a few years later that she had taken a job at Gateway. She called me and said it was a great business and they were looking for someone to manage the Word Processing Department, and would I be interested? She said, "Follow me in my new career and so I did".

Maybe in my search of a way to help support the family I was looking for someone to follow. She was the one in my life who said, "Follow Me." And by the way, she had 3 boys and one girl and I followed her lead again and I had 3 boys and 1 girl. Following Alene didn't just feel right. It felt necessary and provided several rewards.

On to our story of Jesus choosing his disciples, as Jesus was passing along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen. "Follow Me," Jesus told them, "and I will make you fish for people!" Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in their boat

mending their nets. Immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.

Maybe that's how Simon and Andrew, and James and John felt that what Jesus was asking didn't just feel right, but it felt necessary. I'm always amazed at how Simon and Andrew and James and John don't say a word. They don't ask a single question. Wouldn't you think that they would at least ask, "Where are we going? What will we do? How long will we be gone? What should we take?" They don't ask any of those questions. Those were not their concerns. They just got up and went. I think they were more concerned about who they would become than the logistics of the trip.

It's impossible to believe that if Jesus approached some of the young farmers in the area and said, "Follow Me" that they would get off their tractors, walk away from their farming operation without checking with their parents, their siblings, their banker or anybody else involved in their farming operation. That a young person could just say, I need to follow my dream. I need to follow Jesus.... but that's what these four young fishermen did. They just walked away and followed Jesus.

We all have "follow me" moments of life: those moments of decision, change, and not knowing; moments when the world and life become larger than before; moments when we step out to follow our leader.

How crazy is it when two people look at each other and say, Let's get married. For Roger and I who were 18 and 19, we said, "You're the one. I don't know what will happen next week, in a year, or twenty years from now but I am willing to go find out with you. You want to get married? You want to make a life together? That's a "follow me" moment. And 57 years later, we still find those Follow Me moments.

Think about when we come to this place for the funeral liturgy of a loved one, and, in the midst of tears and pain, in the longing to have our loved one back, we declare that life has changed... not ended Have you ever looked at your life and wondered what it was all about, faced a truth about yourself, longed for something new, or wanted a different way of living and being? And then you made changes, life giving changes that fit you made you grow up? That's a "follow me" moment.

The "follow me" moments of life are less about where are going or what we are doing, and more about who we are becoming. They touch us deeply and speak to our heart. So much so that Simon and Andrew were willing to drop their nets and walk away, and James and John were willing to get out of the boat and leave their father Zebedee. They were willing to follow Jesus. Such a simple request from Jesus, "Follow Me".

What are the moments in your life that have touched you so deeply and spoken so directly to your heart that you couldn't do anything but get up and go? You had to follow that calling. It was real and authentic for you and your life.

These moments are not once in a life time opportunities. They present themselves again and again throughout our lives. "Follow me" is the ever present and ongoing call of Jesus to every one of us. So, let me ask you this. What is the "follow me" moment for you today, right now, in the current circumstances of your life?

"Follow me" moments seem to have a common thread. They ask us to let go, to leave behind, to walk away. Isn't that what Simon and Andrew and James and John did? We never get anywhere new unless we are willing to leave where we are. We can never hold anything different unless we're willing to drop what's already in our hands. That means letting go of our nets, getting out of our boats, and walking away.

Nets and boats and walking away are just symbols and images descriptive of our lives and they hold a key to the "follow me" moments of our lives. What are the nets in your life? The things that entangle you? Those things that capture and imprison you. The ones that are overly familiar and comfortable and keep you sailing the same old waters of life? Who is old man Zebedee in your life, that one from whom you continually seek

approval and try to meet his or her expectations? Is it a parent? Is it a boss? Identify the nets, boats, and Zebedees in your life and you'll find a "follow me" moment and the invitation to step more fully into your life and become more truly yourself.

Sometimes we just can't hold on to those things that hold us back. We need to forge ahead and if the leader doesn't come to us, we need to go to them.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that tomorrow we celebrate the birthday of one of the greatest Black leaders in American History. Martin Luther King Jr. gathered his people and said "Follow Me". His "I have a Dream Speech" is one of the most revered speeches of all time in the Christian world. The last few words of that speech are Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last. He was trying to get his people to let go of their bonds, let go of their nets, get out of the boat, and leave those people who are holding them back.

The disciples were working as fisherman, but when they received the call, they enthusiastically followed. And Jesus gave them a new vocation – to fish for people. He took the skills they presumably already had – fishing – and used their abilities to help them learn how to be disciples. I believe God's call works in many of the same ways today.

God nurtures in us the talents, gifts, and interests that we have, and helps us find ways to use them to be a part of what God is doing in the world. These often become identified as spiritual gifts, and range from beautiful singing voices and compassionate hearts to the ability to organize and understand numbers. All of these are needed for the work of Christ's kingdom – therefore, all of us are called. We just need to know how to understand what that means for us.

God is speaking to us this morning. We need to listen to what He is saying to each and every one of us. Amen and Amen.