

“To Follow”
Sermon by Scott Runyon
Chilson Hills Church
Jan 22, 2012

Luke 5:1-11

1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

How many of you have spent much time around chickens? I grew up with chickens back in the 1980s selling eggs to my teachers and neighbors. A couple of years ago my dad bought some chickens for the first time in years. In these past few years I have watched them a bit differently. In particular, I was enlightened on January 7th with a dose of chicken culture that relates to the passage from Luke that was just read.

As the weather started to get colder last fall, my dad closed up the chickens in the barn to keep them warm for the winter. Just a few weeks ago on a warmer sunny January day, I was walking with my parents around the barn near the outside chicken run. Feeling the warmth of the sun, my mom said, "Hey, I bet the chickens would love to be outside today." So, my dad went in and pulled open the hatch so they could come outside into the chicken run.

Now chickens are creatures of habit and they had become accustomed to that hatch being closed for a number of months, and they let us know right away they didn't like it open. I could tell because they first of all avoided the hatch, and secondly they went crazy inside with all kinds of squawking, a very distinctive squawk. How many of you know what that sounds like? If you've spent much time around chickens when a predatory animal is near or you do something out of the ordinary near them, you know what I am talking about. Then, a rooster jumped up to the ledge at the hatch looking outside.

To understand what happened next you have to know a few things about roosters and hens, and chicken culture. The roosters look out for the hens and the hens follow the lead of the roosters. Roosters will keep an eye out for danger patrolling the perimeter of an area while the hens eat, then they'll go to eat later - even when the yummiest food is dropped in front of them - like a fresh pumpkin from the garden cracked open with lots of pumpkin guts and seeds (their favorite). Roosters will jump ahead to defend a hen or round them up when it is time to get into the chicken barn to roost for the night. The hens will follow their lead. So, when the rooster jumped up on the ledge to look outside, the whole flock got instantly and completely silent as they watched and waited for the rooster to let them know what to do next. At that moment, you could hear a pin drop in the barn.

Jesus asks his disciples, starting with Peter, to follow him. In order to understand what this meant, we have to know just a bit of Jewish Rabbi culture, in some ways like chicken culture. If you were a Jewish child, you would grow up being taught to love the scriptures. As a young teenager, after your diligent study, you would ask to study under a rabbi. The rabbi would either say yes, or no. He would only say yes if he looked at you and considered you not only a worthy student but able to be like him. It was a great honor to be asked to follow a rabbi. When one is chosen, it means they would leave everything behind, their parents, home and career. They would then dedicate their life with singular focus to learn from the teacher how to walk, talk, behave, love, and serve. Essentially, everything they had known would be relearned and patterned after their rabbi. That would be the way they would carry their rabbi's yoke, or teaching.

I need a few volunteers to demonstrate what this is like. I want you (leader) to walk around the worship space here and the other two of you to follow walking and moving just like the leader. Wait, stop. I think some music will help.

Play 57 seconds of "Follow the Leader" song from Peter Pan.

A young student would need to do that, imitate every move to learn to be like their rabbi.

Back to Peter. It is likely that Peter was a reject when it came to this advanced rabbinic teaching. What I mean is that he had been passed over by other rabbis, who didn't consider him worthy to be a student... until Jesus came along, that is. In the Luke passage, Peter was busy with his father's business as a fisherman, even knee deep in mending his nets when Jesus came on the scene. Isn't it just like Jesus to choose the rejects? Do you sometimes feel like a reject?

The story in Luke is quite vivid and gives us a clue that Jesus, from his first interaction with Peter, is modeling for him how he wants Peter to minister. He is already teaching Peter without Peter even realizing it. In the story, Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee in the morning with a crowd of people following him. He sees Peter and some other professional fishermen tending their nets after a long night of fishing. Peter had been unsuccessful the whole night, catching nothing. He is likely exhausted, but Jesus asks to be his partner in ministry right then and there by putting his boat out a bit from shore so he can sit in it while talking with the people. This means Peter is probably working hard to steady the boat for Jesus, maybe for several hours. He has got to be beat at that point.

But Jesus isn't done with him. After that, Jesus asks Peter to trust him and do something that seemed preposterous to him. Jesus, from the highlands of Nazareth, not a fisherman, is going to tell Peter, a professional fisherman who grew up in a family of fishermen, how to fish. He tells Peter to head back out with his boat, but this time go into the deeper water to cast nets out again for another catch. Peter knows how crazy this sounds. He, and every fisherman worth their salt, knew that nighttime was the best time to catch fish and the best place is by the shore where fresh water feeds the lake and fish have better access to food. Besides, Peter doesn't even have the right kind of equipment for what Jesus is asking him to do. He only has his shallow-water, night-fishing net. He didn't bring his deep-water net. Jesus' request sounds ludicrous!

So Peter's response is understandable. He grumbles and essentially says "Good grief Jesus! You clearly don't know what you are talking about! We worked all night when everyone knows the fishing is best and we caught nothing, but because you say so, I will toss out the nets again, and we'll see who knows what about fishing!"

Low and behold, Peter catches so many fish that he motions to one of his fishing buddies at shore to bring out another boat and they fill both boats so full it nearly swamps them. It is clear that this kind of fishing would make Peter a very rich man! Peter, however, turns to Jesus in humility saying he isn't worthy to be in the presence of such a master.

Jesus lifts up Peter, encourages him and asks him **to follow**. Jesus says to Peter, "I know that you can be like me. Follow me and I will show you how." Then, Jesus gives him a hint about what is **to follow** after he says yes, which he eagerly does, because of course it is an honor to be asked to follow a rabbi. Jesus tells Peter he will now be a fisher of people. That's what is to follow. The huge catch of fish foreshadows for Peter his future as a fisher of many many people.

How is Peter to do this? Jesus steps along side Peter depending on him to steady the boat and cast the nets. He was demonstrating the partnership ministry that he would be asking Peter to join. If Peter wanted to be successful in this human fishing endeavor he must watch Jesus closely and carefully and do as Jesus was doing. In this way he would learn how to be an exceptional fisher of people.

Following Jesus is like the Follow The Leader game, but so much more. Do you truly want to live the way God created you to live? Do you desire to fulfill your destiny and uncover the meaning of your life? Do you want to live well and whole? All of these are available to you as you follow Jesus. You **can** make a choice to follow even now, even if you feel like a reject, or passed over. Jesus has chosen you, because he knows you can be like him.

But then, what does it look like to follow Jesus? What is next for you? Life very well could be different. You might think, "Jesus is not here for me in the flesh like he was for Peter to walk you into your future." And yet, we read in scripture what God wants for us. Jeremiah 29:11 says that God has plans to prosper us, give us hope and a future worth living. In John 10, Jesus says that he came so that we might have a full life. John 3:16 says that God loves us so much that God wants us to have an eternal and abundant relationship with God beginning right now!

God also gives us a clear indication through scripture that following Jesus is about serving others. That is the example Jesus lives throughout the Gospels. In the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, those who follow Jesus are those who serve to meet the real needs of those who are without essential resources. The followers of Jesus are those who feed the hungry, give to those who are thirsty, welcome the stranger, provide for those who need clothing, care for the sick, and befriend those in prison. In our environment, we might say it is about sticking up for someone who has ridiculed, bullied, and unloved because they are gay, or overweight, or counseling someone who has been abused by a relative and lives in fear and with low self esteem. It might be providing a place to stay for the homeless, or visiting a veteran in the VA hospital, or finding a job for the unemployed, or helping someone get their GED after they are trying to put their life back together after spending time in jail. Perhaps it is offering a listening ear to someone who is emotionally

distraught after a divorce, or providing medical care for someone who is injured or sick and without health insurance. We choose as Jesus leads.

Following Jesus' example might feel daunting. After all, the life that Jesus lived ultimately led to his death. Jesus lived a life that was difficult and challenging. At the same time, when we are doing what God created us to do, that is a life full and more rewarding than we could ever imagine. Jesus' example teaches us that we find our life by giving it away. I believe that the future is not yet written. What is next is up to us as we partner with Jesus. But don't be discouraged. Jesus knows us, like he knew Peter, better than we know ourselves. And he promised that he would never leave us as we partner with him in ministry to fulfill our purpose in this life.

This is just like Michelangelo the artist of, *David*, of one of the most renowned statues of all time. *David* was one of 12 large commissioned statues for a spectacular cathedral in Florence, Italy. Two other artists had been commissioned to complete this work and had only roughly hewn part of the lower legs, then the 19 foot tall chunk of marble lay outside in the weather for more than 25 years. An group of people representing the cathedral set up a search for the right artist to complete this work. They consulted many artists including Leonardo Da Vinci, but it was 27-year-old Michelangelo who convinced them he was the man for the job based on his vision for what *David* could be. He had in his mind a clear picture of what *David* looked like. Then he got out his chisel and started chipping away everything that wasn't *David*. Two years later his masterpiece was revealed and has endured for more than 500 years.

Jesus was that way for Peter. He had a clear vision of who Peter truly was, what he was born to be and do. Like a good rabbi, he called Peter to follow and live that vision, to chisel away until his life became what God intended for him. And Jesus is calling you to follow too. The point is to follow Jesus, who knows you better than you know yourself. But the question still remains for you, what is to follow? What is next for you?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Sunday, January 22, 2012

Foundational Scripture: **Luke 5:1-11**

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=194336923>

Sermon Title: "To Follow"

Sermon Question: Once you choose to follow Jesus, what is to follow?

Featured Scripture Reflection: Peter was called out of his life as a fisherman into a life of fishing for people.

Opening Ice Breaker: How have you experienced God's tug to follow in your life?

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read **Luke 5:1-11**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=194336923> What stands out to you about this story? What questions does it raise? What does it tell you about Jesus? About Peter?
- Read **Matt 25:31-36**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=194336976> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? What does it say about following Jesus?

How is God speaking through scripture?

- What is the good news in these passages of scripture?
- After discussing these passages, how do they speak to you?

God's Word

- What is God's invitation to you?
- What action do you feel compelled to take after discussing these passages?

Prayer

Jesus, we have chosen to follow you. Help us to follow your lead into action.