

## FOLLOW ME

I've just this week begun reading a book called Leaders Eat Last, by Simon Sinek. I'm just beginning to read the book, but I ran across something that surprised me. I am a person who has always loved history. Barbara keeps trying to get me to try out for Jeopardy, because if it's history or science or geography, there's a good chance I know the answer. Just don't give me opera. That one trips me up!

But I ran across something in the early pages of Leaders Eat Last that surprised me. There was a quote on leadership by the 6<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, John Quincy Adams. John Quincy Adams is a name that I have heard, of course. He was the son of John Adams who was the second President. But his presidency wasn't particularly noteworthy. In fact, he was elected under somewhat scandalous circumstances, and I know more about the scandal than I do about his administration. I had no idea that he ever said anything memorable.

But in the course of doing my due diligence, I tracked down the quote and discovered that he said a number of things that we might need to hear today. For example, he said, "Try and fail, but don't fail to try." He also said, "I have to study war and politics, so that my sons can study mathematics, commerce, and agriculture, so that their sons can study poetry, painting, and music." Isn't that a great vision?!

But the quote that was in the book, may be his best quote. He said, "If your actions inspire people to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." That's a high standard. By that standard, I don't know that I'm a very good leader. I may have accomplished a few things, but I don't know that I have inspired anyone to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more. I hope one day, perhaps, I will.

I guess it was just providence that I ran across this quote as I was thinking about this sermon. Our passage for today is from the fourth chapter of the Gospel According to Matthew. According to the story, Jesus has just come out of the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. As this passage opens, Jesus has heard that John has been taken into custody. When he heard that he withdrew into Nazareth and Galilee, and settled in the town of Capernaum, which is on the sea of Galilee in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

The scripture then makes it clear that Jesus went there to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had said, that a great light would dawn from the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. Now, I have preached on this passage before, and I talked about what those verses from the Prophet Isaiah meant. Today, I want to take a little different tack. I want to talk about Jesus and his leadership, because I see something extraordinary in this passage. He tells Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, "Follow Me," and they immediately got up and followed him. Then after a few more verses it tells us the same thing about James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The fourth chapter of the Gospel According to Luke records that Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother before he called Peter and Andrew to be disciples. That clearly indicates that

they knew who he was. However, those details are missing in the account given by Matthew and Mark. Those accounts give no hint that the disciples knew Jesus prior to being called as disciples. In fact, just the opposite. The way this account is written, it looks as if he was just walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, happened upon them, and told them to come. It just sort of happened.

Luke, on the other hand, tells more of a story. Jesus comes to the boat, gets in and has them put out a bit from the shore. He then preaches to the crowd. Then he has them put out a bit more and tells them to let down their nets. Peter says, "Lord, we've fished all night and caught nothing, but if you tell me to, I will put out my nets." The net then comes back full of fish, bursting to the point of breaking. They have to call their friends to help them. Then Jesus tells them, "I will make you fishers of men." In short, Jesus provides them with a miracle to convince them to follow. In Luke. That doesn't happen in Matthew.

John tells the story entirely different. According to him, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples one day when Jesus walked past. John saw Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!", and John's two Disciples heard him say that and followed Jesus. I guess they just left John standing there- you know, "see you later".

The story gets better. Jesus noticed the two disciples following him and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to him, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." The scripture then tells us that one of those two disciples was Andrew. Andrew then went and recruited his brother Peter. According to John, the only one to whom Jesus said, "Follow me," was Philip. The point, I think, is that except for Philip, the Disciples chose to follow Jesus of their own accord. They were not commanded to do so by Jesus.

Anyway, rather than try to reconcile these disparate stories, I'm going to tell the story from Matthew's point of view. Matthew's story is a strange one. The Disciples appear to have simply gotten up and followed. If they asked any questions or raised any objections, that isn't recorded in the scripture. No miracle is provided in this story to try to convince them. The disciples don't decide on their own initiative to follow Jesus. They don't appear to have heard a sermon. They have no witness, such as John the Baptist, to confirm the identity of Jesus. In John and Luke, there were miracles performed and sermons preached prior to the calling of the disciples. Not here. Instead, Jesus tells them to follow and they do it! They just do it. It seems to be a case of Jesus said it, they did it, and that settles it.

I want you to think about this for a minute. Most of you, if not all of you, were raised in the church. Every one of you, at the very least, knows who Jesus is. I suspect most of you would be quick to claim Jesus as your Lord. In this story, there's no indication that any of that is true. This scripture doesn't say that they had even heard of Jesus. It is only much later in the story when the Disciples come to call Jesus Lord. For that matter, the way Matthew tells the story, he could have been a stranger to them.

Now, picture yourself in their shoes. Imagine you are at your work, and someone comes along and says, "Follow me." You've never met them before. You don't know who they are. Would you do it? If you answered that question with a yes, then my next question is, "Why are you lying to me?" None of us would do that. Apparently, Simon and Andrew's mother didn't tell them about stranger danger.

But here's what strikes me about that story. You see the situation of Simon and Andrew is very different from ours. Every one of you knows Jesus. At the very least, you've heard the name. You probably have heard the stories of Jesus many times. Most of you truly believe that Jesus is your Lord. The same is true for me. So, how come we find it so hard to follow? If Matthew's account is to be believed, they might not have known who Jesus was, yet they got up immediately to follow. I don't know about you, but I find excuses not to follow.

There's a deep theological question raised by this story. Who is Jesus to you? So many of the people in the scripture came to get something from Jesus. They came to be healed or to hear him preach. What sets Simon and Peter apart is that they chose to follow and serve. Their reaction indicates that they saw Jesus as Lord and Master. In my view, that's what made them Disciples- the choice to follow.

I once heard a friend of mine say, that his preacher had told him that he was not going to be responsible for my friend's spiritual growth. His spiritual growth was his own responsibility. I'm telling you the same thing. I can tell you the stories about Jesus. I can give you opportunities. Your relationship with God is your responsibility, just as mine is my responsibility. I can't do it for you! I suggest you begin by asking yourself a question. You don't have to tell me the answer, but, with respect, you need to know how you would answer this question for yourself.

Here's the question. What is it going to take for you to follow Jesus? Do you need to see a miracle for that to happen? Do you need to hear Jesus preach? Do you need for someone to point out Jesus to you as he passes by? Or are you willing to take a chance on the man who comes to where you are and says, "Follow me?" That's an important question for all of us, because how we answer that question is going to determine how much your relationship with your savior will grow.

Eternal life begins when we're saved by the Grace of Christ. That's not where it ends. That relationship can grow richer, deeper and more abiding throughout our lives, or it can become stale. Yeah, whatever, I'm saved. Go away. Leave me alone. Our salvation is not at stake here; our ability to experience the depth and breadth of the love of Christ is. Do you know the difference between a believer and a disciple? A believer believes. A disciple believes and serves. The difference lies in how motivated we are to pray and to serve and to grow.

Jesus has the same message for us that he had for the Disciples that day. He wants us to follow him. If we follow him, then we will get to see the glory of the kingdom. What do we have to lose? When Jesus says, "Follow Me.," what do you say?

