

FOLLOW ME!

Matthew 9:9-13

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I'm going ask the confirmation class 4 questions a little later but I have some questions to ask you first. 1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world. 2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners. 3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America pageant. 4. Name ten Nobel or Pulitzer Prize winners. 5. Name the last five Academy Award winners for best actor and actress. 6. Name how much last year's winners of the World Series winners are worth. We're talking about the top achievers in the world, people who have nearly universal name recognition so you shouldn't have any trouble answering the questions. So how did you do?

Here's another quiz. 1. List five teachers who helped you through school. 2. Name five friends who helped you through a difficult time. 3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile. 4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special. 5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with. 6. Name five heroes or heroines whose stories have inspired you. My guess is that we can all answer the second set of questions. The point is that people who make a difference in our lives aren't people with the most money, athletic prowess, intelligence, physical beauty, or fame. They're people who care about you and have made sacrifices for you.

The name of Jesus has never appeared on a list of wealthiest people. He was once rich but he became poor so we might become rich. Jesus never won a Heisman trophy or earned a World Series ring. He never won a beauty contest, a Nobel Prize, a Pulitzer or an Academy Award. Jesus is like a teacher who continues instructing us throughout our lives even if we don't

get what he's trying to teach. He's a friend ^{like} never leaves or forsakes us. His love makes us feel appreciated and special. So when he calls us, we follow.

We began the service singing, "Come, Christians, follow where our Savior trod." Nine young people are responding to the call of Jesus to follow him. My guess is they don't have the slightest idea what they're getting into. ^{No one than Abraham or Matthew} They haven't given a lot of thought about the disreputable group of people they're getting mixed up with. I didn't when I was confirmed. I'm sure Matthew, the Tax Collector, had no idea where he'd end up when he started to follow Jesus.

How does Jesus get Matthew to drop everything to follow him? Matthew isn't a penitent sinner. That comes later. He isn't a seeker who's made a theological discovery about Jesus. That comes later. At this point doesn't know much about Jesus. We can't even say he has faith yet, and we certainly can't say he understands where this journey will take him. But there's something about Jesus that's compelling. So Matthew immediately drops everything to follow Jesus. It's as if Matthew had been waiting all his life for the most wonderful phone call and it finally came and he answered the call.

Where will our following take us? Not necessarily where we want to go but where we're wanted and needed, until, by a kind of alchemy, where we're wanted and needed becomes where we want to be.

Jesus doesn't call us just once, when we're confirmed. He'll call us throughout our lives. You'll hear him calling you, sometimes, in the night. You may be on the other side of the world. You may be in a palace or a gutter and you'll hear him calling. "Follow me. Wherever you are. Whatever you're doing. Whatever you've become. Follow me!"

Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow me." He didn't say, "Believe I'm your Lord and Savior." ^{I don't ask to explain Trinity or Sacraments ask} That came later. And Matthew, surprisingly, didn't ^{ask} questions. His response reminds us

that if we wait for all our questions to be answered, all of our doubts solved, and all our sins overcome – we’d never follow. Jesus calls us to follow him. I’ve been following Jesus, more or less, for over fifty years and I still don’t have all my questions answered, all my doubts resolved or all my sins overcome.

Notice what happens next, after Matthew responds to the call of Jesus. All of a sudden tax collectors and other sinners come out of the woodwork like blood sucking ticks when you take a walk in the woods. It’s important for us to realize the word “sinners” in this context means “unchurched people.” Religious leaders, in those days, labeled people sinners if they didn’t strictly observe all the religious laws. *like Sabbath, observance* By those standards, most of us would be considered sinners. So there they were, all sitting at a dinner table eating with Jesus. Jesus had a way of attracting people who don’t usually go to church – something that the church has lost the knack for unfortunately.

Jesus wants all of us to sit there with him at the table. But some people don’t want to sit with Jesus if it means sitting next to sinners. “I don’t go to church because those church people are a bunch of hypocrites. They think they’re goody two-shoes but they’re no different from me.” That’s right! The church is filled with hypocrites and sinners. Filled with people who say one thing and do another. If you follow Christ you’re going to end up compromising your integrity by eating with sinners. But Jesus desires, “Mercy, not sacrifice.” In other words, Jesus wants you to be as merciful with us sinners and hypocrites as God has been merciful to you. If you don’t have compassion for sinners and hypocrites then you’ll stay away from the table where Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus call Matthew followed

Finally, notice that the journey of faith begins with the call of Jesus. This is why we baptize our children. Long before they’re able to choose Jesus, the sacrament makes it clear that

Jesus has chosen them. If the journey of faith begins with our choices, we'll always be in doubt. We'll worry "Do I have enough faith? Am I good enough?" But if the journey begins with the call of Jesus, then our doubts about our faithlessness become opportunities to discover more about the faithfulness of Christ. So whenever we renew our baptismal vows we're recommitting ourselves to turn back to Jesus. Confirmation is really a Presbyterian revival service. You're going to come forward during my invitation and promise before God and the church that you're turning from sin and evil and turning to follow Jesus.

When we get confirmed we're responding to the love of God. Think of the first time you were in love. Some night, after a series of wonderful dates, one of you decided to say, "I love you" to another person. Maybe you planned on saying it, or maybe it just came up. Maybe you were at a lovely restaurant. After dinner you took the risk. "I love you." Then you stopped breathing and waited for a response. Only one response would do. If the other person just said, "Thank you" you'd think, "Oh, well, forget it. Check please" and go home. But your lover may not have given you an answer immediately. But you knew you'd never breathe freely again until you heard the response, "I love you, too." In baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ took a gigantic risk. He said to Brian, Margeaux, Scot, Eric, Rachel, Lena, Christine, Will, and Jim, "I love you". Then Jesus took a long, deep, anxious, breath and began waiting. He's been waiting for years. And today, when I ask them the Confirmation questions, he hopes to hear them say, "I love you too."