

**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 15, 2012**

"BY INVITATION"

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Jesus said, "FOLLOW ME." Philip said, "COME AND SEE." And in just 5 small words we have the entire history of the Christian Church from the very beginning of the Church, right up to this very day in this very Church. FOLLOW ME! COME AND SEE! And since we seem to be stuck with a discussion of ANNUAL REPORTS about this time of the year, the answer to all our problems is found in those same 5 words. Here it is for the Evangelism Committee, the Stewardship Committee, the Finance Committee, the Christian Education Committee, the Social Ministry Committee, the Worship Committee, and even the Property Committee, the report to the congregation and goals for the future: JESUS SAYS, FOLLOW ME, and WE SAY, COME AND SEE! So... how are we doing?

Those simple 5 words would be the good news for today! It does not get any easier than that! Jesus says, "FOLLOW ME!" And down through that long chain of Children of God, from Philip and the first Disciples, to each and every one of us as Children and Disciples, it is now our turn to say to the world, "COME AND SEE!"

But you know what follows next. If there is good news, it's only natural that there will be bad news. So how come 5 simple words can be so hard to do?

I offer 2 possible answers to that question. Both come from recognized theologians.

The first is Kurt Struckmeyer, a man who writes devotional material.

Here's what he has to say:

"Millions of people throughout the world call themselves Christians. From Roman Catholics to Protestants, from fundamentalists to liberals, there are many different perspectives about what it means to be a Christian. One can become lost in the complexity of beliefs, dogmas, moral injunctions and religious rites.

But in a larger context, that of daily life, it is often impossible to distinguish one Christian from another, or even a Christian from a non-Christian. Most Christians blend in with the values, lifestyles, economics and politics of the culture of their society.

But it wasn't always this way. Once upon a time, Christians stood out from the crowd."

Well put! Jesus says, "FOLLOW ME." And we ask, "Where? Why? When? How?" And when it's time to say, "COME AND SEE." We are not even sure where to look ourselves.

The second perspective comes from Garrison Keillor, the teller of good Lutheran stories. He tells a story from his youth. It's about the choosing of sides for sandlot baseball. Here's how it happens. There were two boys, as Garrison tells it, Daryl and David. They were always the captains, exercising their privilege as though by divine right. First they would pick the popular boys, the natural athletes. Then it came time to deal with the rest. Keillor writes:

"After the popular ones got picked, we stood in a bunch looking down at the dirt, waiting to see if our rating had changed. They took their sweet time choosing us; we had plenty of time to study our shoes. Mine were Keds, black, though white ones were more popular. Mother said black wouldn't show dirt. Nine boys to a side, four already chosen, 10 positions left, and the captains look us over. They choose the popular ones fast, and now the choice is hard because we're all so much the same: not so hot! And then they are down to their last grudging choices, a slow kid for catcher and someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it, except maybe two guys, and when they come to bat, the captain sends the poor right fielder to left, a long, humiliating walk.

They choose the last ones two at a time, 'You and you,' because it makes no difference, and the remaining kids, the scrubs, the excess, they deal for as handicaps ('If I take him, then you gotta take him'). Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. Just once I'd like Daryl to pick me first. 'Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes! You! Come on!' But I've never been chosen with any enthusiasm."

Again, well put! Jesus says, "FOLLOW ME." And we say, "WHO, ME?" And when it's time to say, "COME AND SEE." We say, "WHAT IS THERE TO SEE?"

We are not called to be like Jesus. We are called to be His disciples. There's a big difference! The Gospel for today is about the calling of two people who became disciples of Jesus. One was Philip, the other Nathanael. And it's their story that may help us understand. Philip seems to have the missionary instinct about him. He goes to tell his friend Nathanael about meeting Jesus. Nathanael seems to be the skeptic. Hearing that Jesus is from Nazareth, he wonders if anything good can come from that place. And even as he starts to believe in Jesus, it's not because he has faith, but because Jesus told him something about himself that no one else could have known. Jesus simply says "FOLLOW ME" and they do, for the rest of their lives. According to other writings both men carried the Gospel to other parts of the world.

Jesus did not say "Be like Me" He said, "Follow Me." And that is exactly what we should be thinking about when we talk about being the Church, and being the Children of God. We are called to FOLLOW and we are called to CALL others.

Jesus never said "Be like me." He said "Follow me." One of the interesting things about today's disciples is the wide variety of people who make up this body of Christ. To listen to the critics of today's Church is to hear about people who are deluded, poor thinkers or mindless sheep. And if we look at the Church with a critical eye, we will see people who fit that description. But none of those labels cover the entire population that makes up today's Church.

The family of God is made up of smart people and dull people, brilliant people and those who are not quite so bright. There are single-talented people and multi-talented people. There are cowards for Jesus and there are heroes for Jesus. In worship, we will find friendly people and cranky people, easy-going people and irritable people, closed-up people and welcoming people. The Church has its share of both doers and thinkers. In fact there are no types of people left out. And maybe that is exactly the point for today. ALL ARE WELCOME! ALL CAN FOLLOW! ALL CAN SAY COME AND SEE!

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He does not ask us to stop being the people He made us to be. He calls us to open ourselves to be God's children. Be more like Jesus in loving God and loving our neighbor. And we do that using our own talents, abilities, hang-ups and shortcomings. Our prayer should be something like this: "O Lord, take who I am, all that I've got and use it for Your kingdom. Where I fall short, make me as You want me to be. Thank you, holy God, for knowing me and loving me, and for calling me to be Your own."

And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!