

**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 22, 2012**

"COME-AS-YOU-ARE"

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In our Gospel for today, Jesus decides He has had enough of being ALONE! It is time to find some friends! It is time to be surrounded by those who are thinking the same way He is! It is time to add a few more hands to the work that needs to be done! It is time to be the CHURCH! Peter, Andrew, follow Me! James and John, come along! Brothers and sisters, young and old, one and all, COME-AS-YOU-ARE, there is a place in this Church for all of us!

When the Beatles sang "With a Little Help From My Friends" back in the '60s, they were singing about a time when people were getting together to join hands and voices in unity against some things that were going on in the world that needed to be changed. They were singing about getting the whole human family together to make this world a better place. We face our trials and our triumphs WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS!

So what kind of friends is Jesus looking for? What kind of friends does it take to be the Church of Jesus Christ?

The author of a magazine article wrote about what he describes as: "the four kinds of people every business owner needs." He goes on to say, these are the: "four types of supporters who serve as emotional backers and/or advisers." Here are the four types.

THE CHEERLEADER: Athletic teams have them, so why shouldn't we? Cheerleaders are those who rally behind an idea and provide encouragement, especially when an idea is still new. We need to have positive-thinking people around us at all times.

THE ROLE MODEL: This is the "follow me and do as I do" person. Watch this person! Take note of what they do and how they do it. A role model can be a teacher or mentor, but it can also be someone close to us, including family. We learn best, by example!

THE EXPERT: It is always good to surround ourselves with people who are smarter than we are. Experts provide the missing pieces. While we might be good in one area, an expert can fill in another area.

And finally **THE TECHIE:** I guess "TECHIE" sounds better than geek or nerd. These are the people who are wizards with things. It might be the computer or it might be something else all together. Every area has need for someone with the ability to make the hardware work.

The point is that it takes a **TEAM** to really be successful. That might be another name for the **CONGREGATION** of St. John Lutheran Church! **THE TEAM!** And if Jesus believed this to be true, as we hear in today's Gospel, then we had better believe it, too. He needed help from His friends. The Quakers call themselves **THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS!** Are we the friends of Jesus, together for Mission and Ministry?

The practical side of Jesus' mission required the help and participation of others. He does not wait for them to come to Him. He spends time going after them. And most of them are nothing like Him! If the call to the first disciples is any indication, Jesus was not looking for **CHEERLEADERS** or **ROLE MODELS** or **EXPERTS** or **TECHIES**. He did not go **HEAD-HUNTING** at the local synagogue or collect **RESUMES** at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus went down to the lakeshore, where about the only thing He could be sure of, was finding someone who smelled like fish and knew how to bait a hook! But He did know He would find hard-working people. That is the basic character of the disciples He was calling then and is still calling today.

If we are looking for a JOB DESCRIPTION, or in the Church we might call it a MISSION STATEMENT, well, Jesus gives us that as well. He say, *“THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR, REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOOD NEWS.”* The time is now! God is here! Change your ways and believe!

Jesus was and is doing His own kind of “fishing” for followers. Jesus comes looking for friends who will be followers! And He invites them, and us, personally, to join Him in His work.

For Peter and Andrew, James and John, following Jesus was no small disruption of their lives, but a change of course. Throwing in with Jesus meant bringing along all the baggage they had picked up in their lives. Fishing was not easy work, and making a living by fishing was not easy either. But we do not actually believe that any of these men forever gave up their security, their reputation or their livelihood. Jesus wanted them just the way they were. Smell of fish and all! Just like Jesus wants us to follow Him, just the way we are. Faults! Failings! And shortcoming! Right along with our God-given blessings of TIME & DESIRE, TALENTS & SKILLS, TREASURES & CONTRIBUTIONS! We all have something to bring to this work!

Is Jesus looking for cheerleaders, role models, experts and techies? YES, OF COURSE! And a whole lot more! Jesus wants people at all levels, with just one common qualification: the desire to follow. The personal desire to say YES to God, Just-The-Way-We-Are!

For those first Disciples, they did not understand what they were getting into, but they followed, anyway. JUST-AS-THEY-WERE, smell of fish and all! The COURAGE to follow at the lakeshore, turned into PANIC at the Garden of Gethsemane, DENIAL at the trial of Jesus, and FEAR in the locked room after the crucifixion, and then... And then it turned into the preaching of the Good News. The joy of forgiveness! The hope of salvation! The grace of God! The love of the Lord Jesus! The power and presence of the Holy Spirit!

Imagine Jesus walking into an office building, a factory or a store and tapping someone on the shoulder saying, “Follow me.” Well, don’t try to image too hard, because that is exactly what Jesus does. But there is no way that Jesus wants that person to walk away, with the monthly business report unfinished, or the manufacturing job half done, or the final sale not in the bag. *JESUS WANTS US TO BE WHAT WE ARE, and, TO GO WHERE HE WILL LEAD US.*

Will Jesus disrupt our lives? Absolutely and without a doubt! And nothing could be finer, then to hear Jesus say, “YOU ARE MY FRIENDS! NOW FOLLOW ME!”

So, what does it take? Here it is from the mouth of a child.

A kindergarten teacher gave her class a show-and-tell assignment. Each child was asked to bring in an object to share with the class that represented his or her Church. The first student said, “My name is Benjamin and I am Jewish. This is a Star of David.” The second student said, “My name is Mary. I am a Roman Catholic. This is a rosary.” The third student said, “My name is Tommy. I am a Lutheran, and this my covered-dish!”

Here we are! The covered-dish, UN-COVERED! Just-As-We-Are we love and serve the Lord. And all God’s children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!