Epiphany 3

Pastor Aprille Jordan, Valley of Christ Lutheran Church in Frenchtown.

IMMEDIATLEY! They left their nets and followed Jesus.  It is really impressive when there is something we want to do urgently, promptly, and instantly.

--That’s the situation for Simon and his brother Andrew, and for James and his brother John.  All 4 fishermen left family and jobs to follow Jesus, immediately upon hearing the call from Jesus.

That’s a big change in their lives…what a gigantic step!  What a moment!

Jesus words must have sounded strange, follow me and fish for people instead of for lake fish.  What could they have thought that meant?

Jesus gives no explanation for his challenge.

Nor does he give these men a clear business plan of sorts as to what this following will entail. He makes no promise of success or benefits.  He simply says Follow Me.

And curiously, they are not portrayed as having agonized over their decision to drop everything and follow Jesus.

They did not first go home and sleep on it or discuss it at length with family members or friends or with each other.  Instead, Mark says, they immediately dropped everything and followed him.

It must have been quite a moment to remember.  Kind of like the moment in a wedding where we say, “*I do”* and then kiss.  I mean, what a moment to remember!

The only thing is—in marriage it takes more than just that exciting brief moment of saying YES.  It also takes a lifetime to really make it all become a trusted loving reality that’s worth something.

Becoming a faithful Christian disciple also takes both a moment of saying YES and a lifetime, to turn it into a trusted loving reality that’s worth the YES.

There is so beyond just saying YES to Jesus.  In that lifetime there is not only the “ups” but “downs” to having said YES. The “downs” include sinful mistakes, stumbling, backsliding and misunderstandings about what it means to be a follower.

At least that was true for those 4 fishermen.  They immediately left everything to follow Jesus, but oh, each in their own way proved that it takes a lifetime to learn how to follow Jesus.

For, example, Simon Peter as a follower of Jesus showed remarkable insight and displayed his depth of faith.  One time, Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do you people say that I am?”  and “Who do you say that I am?”*  And Simon Peter blurted out “*You are the Messiah*”.  But then when Jesus prophesied that the Messiah he would suffer and die on the cross, Peter said “*No Way*”.

--And after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus, 3 times, abandoning Jesus in one of his most trying times.

James and John were nicknamed “*sons of thunder”* by Jesus.  They had a lot of zeal for being disciples of Jesus, but they let their zeal go to their heads.

--One time they asked Jesus if they could be guaranteed seats at His right and left hand in glory.  Jesus, said no, Leadership as a follower is not about honor or prestige, its about service.  He tells them *“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be a servant.”*

--And how about this:  at the end of Jesus life on earth, when he was on the cross, Peter, Andrew and James and John were nowhere to be found.

Yet, after Jesus death and resurrection appearances to the disciples, they all in their own ways became leaders of the early church.

--They kept living out their YES to Jesus up to their deaths, which for Andrew and Peter was crucifixion.  What a life they led when they said Yes to following Jesus!

What do you think?  Is following Jesus something you are really interested in?  What if it leads to such a change in life as it did for these 4 fishermen?

--Something to keep in mind is that Jesus call to James and John, Peter, and Andrew and to all his followers,

And now to you and me is and always has been not about adding a particular task, or action to our already busy lives, though that may happen, but rather something else.

When Jesus issues the call to follow him, it is an invitation.

 An invitation to a lifelong relationship with him.

And that relationship begins with God, not with us.  In Isaiah 43:1 it says this about that relationship with God: “*Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you; I call you by name, you are mine*.”  Its astonishing that God knows us by name!.  We are but one of billions of people, yet God knows us by name.  And wants to spend time with us.

Our relationship with God is not determined by our good works, our behavior or our being holy and spiritual.  Rather its determined by God’s desire to love us in an eternal relationship.

--That relationship is about what God is doing, first and foremost.

-- For to follow is to not lead, it is indeed to follow.

We all remember the game Simon Says.  Whatever the leader does, we do as followers. So, what is God doing?

--God is saving;  ---God is rescuing;   --God is sustaining and providing; --God is healing and comforting;    ---God is enlightening and blessing.

--God is for life and against death.  God is for love and against hate.

And as his followers who are called into relationship our main task is to pay attention to what God is doing,

--embrace what God is doing, and in our lives do it too.  God leads we follow.

And like the fisherman, its not a call to perfection.  The call to follow is a call to faithfulness marked by fits and starts.

Some weeks as you listen to the Word, you hear something, perhaps just one little thing, that speaks to your situation, your life.

You might feel challenged, comforted, or convicted. You might see your personal issues in a new light. That is Christ calling you, to come, follow me, be in relationship with me.

Or when you receive communion, you might experience the peace which passes all understanding, you might know yourself as beloved, you might feel forgiven,

Today, the call comes to each of us again from Christ who is present in the Word and Sacrament who says:  Follow Me. Come to me. Abide with me in a lifelong relationship that begins anew right now.

Leave behind your regrets, your past mistakes, your what ifs,

and follow me into a life marked by my companionship with you.

And to those who accept this invitation Jesus gives a promise.  It is the same promise he gave his original disciples after his resurrection from the grave:

He says to us as he did to them: “*Don’t be afraid, for look, I am with you even to the end of the ages.”*

So Follow Me.