

“Change the World: Follow Jesus”
Luke 4:18-19

We continue our “Change the World” adventure today with a focus on what it means to follow Jesus. We talked last week about God’s dream for the world and that following the path of Jesus is one of the ways God calls us to fulfill that dream. We talked about the invitation to have a religion with feet to be practiced in daily life. Today we ponder this question: What does it mean for us to follow Jesus?

Let’s start with what it does not mean. Here is a funny video about church shopping which is something many good people engage in without intending to do harm. It is also something that impacts many churches in how they design their ministries:

<https://youtu.be/nT70cA-7qMk>

What does this video tell us about following in the footsteps of Jesus? This kind of approach puts the focus on our ego needs, our likes and dislikes. The church becomes our spiritual club where we go to get consolation or comfort according to our personal preferences. Many good people fall into the trap of making the church into our own image and using the faith to gratify our needs for security, affection, and control. This way if the leadership decides to do something that does not appeal to someone’s taste or that might challenge one’s comfort, the response is usually to complain or to leave the church. Even people who are outside of the church but who believe in Jesus are not immune to this kind of mentality of faith. We want faith to help us get through life. Thus, the center of our faith becomes our own success or comfort. But this way will never really bring us any lasting fulfillment or happiness. With the first challenge to our egos or our sense of security, the whole faith thing falls apart. One of the best images for being a follower of Jesus is wearing an apron instead of a bib. One is a sign of maturity in faith, while the other is about being infants in the faith.

Another misstep is to believe that if we really knew all the facts about Jesus, then we would follow him better. In the 19th century there was a scholarly movement called “The Quest for the Historical Jesus,” which thought that discovering all the historical facts about Jesus was possible. Some believed that it was possible to get a totally objective and accurate historical understanding of Jesus. Some in the Church believed that such a historical portrait would lead people to greater faith. But that was another illusion.

What Jesus calls us to do is to fulfill our purpose in life by living lives of significance instead of focusing on comfort or success. We are called to wear our aprons instead of being stuck in the bib phase. The invitation of life and faith is to journey with Jesus as disciples who learn from him and as apostles who are sent out into the world to continue his mission. When we see our lives in that way, we can really find fulfillment and can then change the world. When we understand what Jesus was passionate about and then do the same, then we are able to continue his ministry.

Today we are going to dig into this path of Jesus and what it means to follow in his footsteps. The best place to start is with Jesus’ own vision for his life’s work. One of the most common questions we ask of children and young people is this: “What do you want to do when you grow up?” Their answer often tells us about their vision for their lives. I remember volunteering in a kindergarten class where the children were asked this question and the

most common answer was: A vet. They loved animals and saw that the best way to live their lives was to help them. Most of the time people choose careers or activities based on what they are passionate about. In our Gospel reading for today, we hear what Jesus was passionate about. Even though he was a teacher and a healer, his passion was for fulfilling God's dream of justice in the world. In today's Bible reading from Luke 4 we hear Jesus proclaiming his purpose and mission using the words of the prophet Isaiah.

According to the Gospel of Luke, this was the speech which Jesus gave at the beginning of his ministry. His mission was a direct quote from the book of Isaiah with a special focus on the "year of the Lord's favor." The phrase, the year of the Lord's favor, that is found in Isaiah and quoted by Jesus as recorded in Luke is a reference to Jubilee. Jubilee was a biblical legislation to help form a community that would practice the love of God in practical ways. The covenant that God established with the people of Israel covered all aspects of life from the spiritual to the most mundane. According to Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15, during a Jubilee year, which was supposed to happen every 50 years (the cycle of seven sabbatical years), the Hebrews were called to practice four things: "1. To forgive all debts, 2. To free all the slaves, 3. To let the land rest, i.e., lie fallow, 4. To return the birthright land to those who lost it." This was a call for a reversal of fortunes to ensure that all people had their basic human needs met. This was the legislation in the law that ensured that people lived with the common good in mind. It was the way to learn and practice how to join God's mission in the world and not be consumed by the needs of our egos.

Jesus saw his mission was to fulfill God's dream of justice, compassion, and love in the world. This was not about having a specific profession. It was instead about a way of life. It didn't matter if he was at a private party or at a public speaking event; if he was alone, with friends or with enemies. What mattered was taking every piece and every opportunity that came his way to change the world. His focus was always on the dream and vision of God which he called "The Kingdom of God." One of the clues for us about this kingdom is in the prayer which Jesus taught the disciples where it says, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Therefore, wherever and whenever we are able to do God's will or to support others in doing God's will, that is how we know that we are on the path with Jesus to fulfill God's dream for the world.

As part of this journey with Jesus I would like to invite you to create a road map for your life. This is not about your career or accomplishments. It is about your calling to fulfill God's dream. In following Jesus' vision for his life, we are going to use six markers on this path. Use one of the feet you received today to write one of these markers where you feel God is calling you to journey:

- 1. The Spirit of God in your life:** The key to Jesus' mission was his connection to God. His prayer life, his knowledge of scripture and his connection to a community of faith were the keys to his ability to let go of his fears to pursue God's dream. Look at your own life and see where God is calling you to grow in your connection to the Spirit. Where do you get your Spirit power-ups each day?
- 2. Good News to the Poor:** When has someone brought you good news? Who needs God's good news in your circle of influence or in our world today? Who needs to be affirmed as a child of God? Where might your feet go on this path if bringing good news is part of your journey?

3. **Release to the Captives:** When did you experience release in your life from something that kept you captive? Who are the captives around you? Who are you called to help release?
4. **Sight to the Blind:** Have you ever had someone help you see things differently as if for the first time? How did they do that? Who are those who are blind in our world today? How are you called to help them see?
5. **The Oppressed Go Free:** Who are the oppressed today who are longing for freedom? What is your part in this?
6. **The Year of the Lord's Favor:** What practices of release, redemption, and justice do our societies need? What is your piece of this big picture of love?

Now use the other footprint card to think about your journey this past week. On the soles of the footprint, write the names of the places you have been this past week. Circle 2 or three places you consider important. On the toes, write down the ways you could use God's call for you to follow the path of Jesus in those places. On the other side, write what messages God wants to tell you about those places. Song, <https://youtu.be/O3lrwujyAJ4>) Sharing. Prayer...Amen.