

## Following Along

Jubilee Mennonite Church  
April 8, 2018

**Purpose:** to explore the fullest meaning of discipleship.

**Message:** We are Christ's disciples, invited as we are to follow Jesus into growth.

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:16-20 [I will read]; John 21:1-14 (please read/have read)

**Synopsis:** Most of the time, we read the disciples in the third person. These are the superheroes of faith who paled around with Jesus and are limited to the first 12 (or 11 depending on how you wish to parse it). We may well be *followers* of Jesus, but by in large we don't claim the title of disciple, let alone accept the charge after that to make disciples the world over. Yet here we are; we are Christ's disciples, receiving the call to be disciples and to make new disciples with all that we meet.

We often read the Gospels as a historical record of the life and times of the Jesus & the disciples (like a band history). But how do we hear differently and more fully when we read the Gospels looking for a how to on being a disciple of the God who meets as where we are and calls us to that which cannot imagine?

*This is the first of a 6 week series on discipleship in Matthew.*

### Notes:

<http://www.evernote.com/l/APmZcv5lqXIDe4beR3XDwaWHNT1xp1vrxz4/>  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APnZcvhPLX9DmrVqzzlNKO4g24i8nzU3QUU/>  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APnRiNiILLpHw6Go8HVxdsH6UJWT59ayxeU/>  
[http://www.evernote.com/l/APmCM\\_nW5xRM4arUZZSvGsXJcK0Oa5GaXr4/](http://www.evernote.com/l/APmCM_nW5xRM4arUZZSvGsXJcK0Oa5GaXr4/)  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APmBf1OZdsdNbo6sBAEptAsMQCC764wap2g/>  
[http://www.evernote.com/l/APl-RzU8xY5KvY-GO4oHYXZZmUgpA\\_bXbXs/](http://www.evernote.com/l/APl-RzU8xY5KvY-GO4oHYXZZmUgpA_bXbXs/)  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APl2ckgxCnRN9LPUNUTc7fzUUSn1UEH4yrk/>  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APkse83z6V5Be7b7OXE39eFuNwHX1GHzz-w/>  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APmcxunWO69BjLxQu9Frp3GHHjllXqpYvYY/>  
<http://www.evernote.com/l/APkZTCZfKbFP65zXSLJJM-o2orBBot8zuGQ/>

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3138](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3138)

## **Matthew 4:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,

Jesus saw two brothers,  
Simon, who is called Peter,  
and Andrew his brother,  
casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> As he went from there, he saw two other brothers,  
James son of Zebedee and his brother John,  
in the boat with their father Zebedee,  
mending their nets, and he called them.

<sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee,  
teaching in their synagogues  
and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom  
and curing every disease  
and every sickness among the people.

<sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria,  
and they brought to him all the sick,  
those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains,  
demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics,  
and he cured them.

<sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee,  
the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea,  
and from beyond the Jordan.

Are you a disciple? Not a question you hear everyday. Not one that we ourselves frequently encounter asked of us. Not one that I am quite sure that I have asked anyone within my living memory. Somehow it doesn't fit into our self-determined, individualistically defined meaning of what it means to be a whole person. We are not terribly likely to put define ourselves as following after anyone. It sounds a bit servile That is what being a disciple is—it is the person that follows after someone else, shaping their lives in the image of the one they follow the best they may. That's just not our style really. We are far more inclined to see our selves as believing in something, and supporting a philosophy of life that we apply the best we may. But following along seems a bit remote to our way of being. Besides, we learned in Sunday school that Jesus had 12 disciples, 11 later as a matter of fact. I was the name of the band—Jesus and the disciples—they were the originals, never to be imitated. Like John, Paul, Ringo, and George made up the Beatles, we know that the boat of being a disciple has sailed. We make this way of being, of following after the risen Christ something which is a matter of history and trivia to be learned, studied for learning and sighted to support our notions, and the gospels a matter of recording and passing on that history for spiritual inspiration and for our study, but by in large not to be worked with as a matter of instruction of how it might be to be to be a disciple even today.

Yet it is precisely this sort of instruction manual that we are given in the Gospels; in Matthew in particular. From the very beginning when Jesus comes and invites the first of the disciples to get up, leave everything behind, and to follow him to the end when they meet the Risen Christ and receiving their marching orders for living the life after Jesus himself would be physically returning to the Father, time and again Jesus offers the wisdom of what it means to be a disciple. The stories and parables that we so neatly pull apart and apply as the occasion seems suitable form a broader whole of those who follow behind Jesus being led from where finds them as they are for what they are through the experiences and learnings of years as they were shaped into the fishers of people they were promised to be. So when Jesus encounters them at the end of the course of study after the resurrection, after they had been shaped by all of their failures every bit as much as the time s when got it right (the passion and resurrection being exhibit A). John's gospel has this scene of them getting on with life, only to be interrupted by the risen Christ welcoming them in, giving them instructions, and sending them out. Matthew tells us about the 11 meeting Jesus in Galilee and receiving their commission to go and make disciples—to go and go

the work of forming and inviting people that Jesus himself had been doing. And so the tradition begins. Disciples make other disciples. And on through generations it has traveled, and here we are; disciples too.

As I pointed out this isn't really what we have been used to walking with. We come to Jesus most often because we are looking for something: healing, love, hope, salvation. It is our need that sends us running a Godward direction. It was true with Jesus in the flesh. It is equally if not more true today. Jesus gives us all of this freely and fully. We should never artificially pit salvation and discipleship, inclining ourselves to think that one could possibly take the place of other. Jesus gives this, but it never stops there. Jesus is always inviting us into The great thing is that when you come to Jesus for all of these things, the invitation never stops just at the reality of what we ask for, but always continues into what Jesus offers—life more fully than what we can possibly know or imagine as Jesus invites us into learning with him what it means to be fully authentically and fully human.

This story of calling I think is emblematic of the process of setting out and getting started as disciple. I always find the action in this text amazing. Jesus comes along the lake, knows who and what he wants, and invites these guys to drop everything and follow him. And you know what? They do! They drop their nets, drop all of what they are doing and follow on with the simple promise of being fishers of people. Its amazing testimony, but I often find myself wondering what it all means. I mean, not for a minute do I want to take away from the power and message of faithful following that this story offers us. Just saying yes is amazing. But sometimes, I wonder whether what they had in mind when they said yes is the same thing as what they ended up experiencing. As much I admire the notion that they dropped entirely what they were doing with the concept of “well, OK I guess I am now a professional follower on for the rest of my life”, I think we loss something for not also allowing for somewhat more modest expectations when they set off here. Sure, they might have said I have a few days. I'll follow along. Perhaps this calling was the beginning of their journey with Jesus, the planting of the seed that became the full flower of faith that they would grow into in time. What starts as a day or two experiment of them going on and listening to this teacher morphed and changed and grew in them as this seed took root and began to change them. They might have begun the course not quite knowing what to expect or

what to commit, but then as they saw and began to understand who it was they were following they undergo what happens to allow of seek to be a disciple of Christ: their mind is changed, their selves are changed, and most of all their hearts are changed, until there is nothing they could even imagine that would tear them away from being the disciples that they had become. The disciples that start at the sea and end at the mountain undergo the most intensive self-improvement course there ever has been—they follow Jesus and the world is forever changed. Whether they left fully convinced or merely curious to me doesn't matter. The fact that they take the steps along the way that makes all the difference.

One of the many gifts of parenting is the completely disturbing washes of memory that come to me from time to time. Usually it is when I say something trying to reign in Luke, or a joke to try to make people laugh, and I have the wash of terrible memory: I have become my father. Every so often, you catch yourself with an echo of the past responding in a way that you never would have chosen yourself, and you realize that it is precisely the person who fathered you has formed you in ways you might never expect. Try as I might, there is no escaping your parents, especially when you are a parent yourself. Most of the time these moments are times for me to laugh at myself, but we cannot underestimate the power of following after someone has on our lives.

We all do it. We all have those people who we follow. Some we have selected, others we are quite simply stuck with, others we choose very carefully for the qualities and the character that they offer into our lives. Discipleship is one of those things that we often speak about, but are not always sure how to follow along. Over the coming weeks, we are going to look at Matthew with an eye toward reading it with the basic question in mind: How does it help up become better disciples? What might it be offering us in the here and now to be the disciples that we are meant to be, giving us to the tools to grow in our own discipleship, and to expand our abilities to do what every disciple is meant to do—support other disciples and make more disciples yet again to pass the torch from one to the next.

So I leave you with this question: Who is it that you follow? How are you following after Christ? How might we say yes to the always present invitation to come, to follow, and to be forever changed. May we each step out onto the road and be forever changed.