

Will You Come and Follow Me

What in the world do we do about this Jesus?

After 2000 years or more of people generation after generation asking the same question, the answer still appears open for debate.

But I think it is a good question with which to wrestle. To be sure our unarticulated capitulation to any of the prevailing understandings of who Jesus is gets the human family into a whole lot of trouble; we see many horrors done in Jesus' name.

I have certainly wrestled with this over time—at times far more comfortable with the distant, transcendent God as opposed to this flesh and blood, “God in sandals” man from Nazareth.

I still can't claim that I have the ultimate answer to unlock this theological riddle, but I do believe that time and time again Jesus offers us a very simple and elegant answer as to how we might travel through this world with love, courage, mercy and hope, and let the question answer itself.

He says, “Follow me.”

Of course, the challenge we find in this simple invitation is that a whole lot of people seem to have a very wide difference of opinion as to exactly where Jesus leads us.

When we trace his path through scripture, we see where he healed the sick, forgave those society and religion said should not be forgiven, ate with people of shaky reputation as well as with those who disagreed with him and, as we will hear this Sunday, he gets very angry at religious authorities who put boundaries on God's mercy. He also acts anyway, even as they plot to do him harm.

He gave sight to the blind, he touched untouchables, he fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, he broke the social and cultural taboos of his day by talking with women and enemies of Israel, and he rejoiced in the Sabbath instead of making it just one more onerous rule.

He wept over the loss of his friend, he became angry at the abuses of organized religion, and he felt a gut wrenching compassion for those who were left alone with no one to care for them.

Follow me. That is what he tells us over and over and over. So to me, the great question and answer to the ultimate riddle of where and how to follow Jesus gets more clear everyday---if we as the Church are people who follow Jesus, our path is already spread out before us.

As detailed above, Jesus' very life is the simple and elegant blueprint we have been given. If we follow Jesus, we will find ourselves in some interesting if not downright uncomfortable places.

We too will find ourselves in places of poverty, sickness, imprisonment, despair and rejection. We will have compassion for the enemy and then break bread with prostitutes and religious fundamentalist alike.

We will find ourselves in places of deep rest and alternately, in places of great turmoil.

We might even find ourselves in dangerous places that try the heart and test the human spirit.

But, we will also find ourselves in places of fellowship, in deeply connected and loving community; we will enjoy great feasts and hear some amazing stories about love, forgiveness, joy and delight.

If we follow Jesus around long enough, we will start to look at people we've been afraid of or rejected and then suddenly, miraculously, see in those lives and faces the very image of God---we will see souls so precious and worthy that we want all that is best and good for them.

But Jesus, if we follow, will take us to some challenging places. Places where we do have to make difficult decisions that put our reputations at risk, places that ask us to be courageous and stand down hate, injustice, bullying or any number of destructive forces in our community of faith, our families or our world.

He asks us to follow him into a world often consumed by violence, hate, and greed and be voices and practitioners of hope, love, peace, grace, generosity, and forgiveness.

Jesus also lived in a violent world of loudly competing voices that stridently spoke in turn of doom and hopelessness, greed and domination---voices that called for violent retribution whenever threat was felt. And we are *all* vulnerable to these voices on our own day and time. That's what makes their call so insidious.

Jesus calls us to follow him into justice, beauty and mercy. Jesus' voice comes into our midst and it binds us in love to those around us. Jesus' voice penetrates our hearts with the knowledge and truth of God's love.

We can follow Jesus and put away our culture's demand that we live life in a frantic, grasping rush; we can offer the hope of a sacred place that is less driven and more holy.

We can offer this gift to all who come through our doors simply starving for a place of deep holiness, rest, peace, and loving, connected community.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+