

5 Epiphany C
February 6, 2022
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

I am sure you have heard of Qumran and the Dead Sea scrolls. Considered one of the most important archeological discoveries ever made, these scrolls reveal the diversity of religious thought that existed before and during the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The amazing thing is that they keep finding more of these scrolls in the caves surrounding Qumran. Here, for example is the translation of a recent discovery:

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph, The Carpentry Shop, Nazareth 25922
FROM: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have chosen for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultants.

The profiles of all tests are included. We recommend that you study each of them carefully.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in the necessary background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. Furthermore, many do not seem to understand the team concept. You might want to seriously consider searching for persons with more experience in managerial ability and proven capability. In any event, here is our summary:

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities necessary for leadership. James and John are, of course, brothers, and thus place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Thaddeus all demonstrated radical tendencies and two of them registered high scores on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, and seeks out contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend that you appoint Judas Iscariot as your controller and next-in-command.

All other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely,

Jordan Management Consultants

Whenever we reach that moment in the Epiphany season where we hear of the calling of the first apostles, I find myself both fascinated, and at the same time, disturbed. Fascinated, in that one can only imagine the sheer power of Jesus' presence, words, and actions as he stood there by the lakeshore of Gennesaret. Disturbed by what can only be described as unbelievably impulsive behavior on the part of those whom he calls to join him. After all, here are four ordinary fishermen...average Joes...who are one moment following their daily routine of mending and casting their nets, catching fish, making their living...and then...they're gone! Left behind were families and friends, (and what happened to all of them?), boats and business associates, responsibilities and reputations.

Can you imagine the village gossip?

And for what reason do they up and leave? They are leaving everything in order to follow some itinerant Rabbi who has the uncanny ability to read the waters and spy out where the fish are! You know, in Matthew's Gospel, there is no initial encounter followed by a sign. Jesus just happens to walk by them and almost casually says, "Follow me..." and they do! That's incredible!

In our present time, such behavior would immediately be labeled "snapping" or "coercive persuasion" or "brain washing." Such behavior on the part of otherwise normal folks could only be the result of some form of coercion. I mean, no one in their right mind would just get up and go. Right?

In his book, "Our Story According to St Mark", the Rev. Bill Barnwell writes, "What strikes me about this passage is not the sacrifice of the first four disciples, but rather their recklessness." That strikes me as well. At least Abraham, when he heard the call of God to leave the safety of his home wisely chose to take Sarah, his brother Lot, and all of his earthly possessions! Abraham took seriously that old Arabic proverb, "Trust in God, but hold onto your camel."

The recklessness of this moment is not just on the part of the first disciples. Look at Jesus. Despite this morning's opening "tongue in cheek", Jesus made no attempt to "evaluate" the "potential" of those he chose. There are no interviews, reference checks, or aptitude tests. There is no course work, no degrees in "Advanced Discipleship." There's no vocational testing program or psychological exam. There's no essay entitled, "Why I feel called to be an Apostle." And the Scriptures speaks of no stress test that would predict how these men would or could handle danger, or how they would hold up under trial, or to what degree they could endure suffering. The fact is that these disciples were uneducated nobodies from an insignificant village in a second-class province on the eastern extremity of the Roman Empire. Their combined potential for proclaiming a message that would forever change the world was exactly nil. A reckless choice indeed! What on earth was Jesus thinking about?

And Jesus simply said, "Follow me." The Truth of God revealed in this morning's moment from Luke's Gospel is this: To be a Christian means to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. It is not about intellectual assent, about simply believing in Jesus and letting it go at that. It is not just about praising his name in word and music and sacraments. It is not about good intentions, about catching up with him sometime in the future. It is not about "You go ahead and I'll catch up with you later."

It IS about making a commitment to follow, a decision around which all other decisions in our lives will revolve. It is about dying to our selves in order to live for him. To paraphrase the words of our wedding service, to be a Christian is to follow Jesus "from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish" until death brings us home to God and to eternal life.

It is, in short, to make a disturbing decision...to be reckless in the world for the sake of Christ.

Why would we do this? Why would we want to give up the comforts of our well thought out and carefully constructed lives in order to follow some itinerant preacher who lived long ago?

For the same reason that Peter, James, and John did in that instant two thousand years ago. Because we know that there is more to life than that which we see. Because at the very heart of our being, we know that there is a God who has created us, loved us, and given us life. Because when we encounter Jesus in the Gospels, in our worship, and in our prayers, when we come face to face with him in the face of others, we know that he is the Son of God. And there is no greater hope, no greater goal, no greater vocation, and no greater joy in life than to follow him.

Towards the end of Jesus' life, Peter says to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus' response is this: "Everyone who has

left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life." That is the promise. It's up to us to decide whether we believe this to be true or not.

"Follow me." I ask you to pray about those words this morning. Are you willing? Are you ready to seek the Truth, come whence it may, cost what it will? Are you prepared to risk it all in order to follow Jesus Christ?

Amen.