

Following Jesus When We Don't Have It All Figured Out
Sermon on John 1:35-51, Pastor Julie McCain
January 7, 2018

Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.

John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples, and he saw Jesus and said: "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" John's disciples heard, and they followed Jesus. **[HIS TWO DISCIPLES HEARD, AND THEY FOLLOWED JESUS]** Just like that.

If only following Jesus were this seamless & simple for us.
The task, obvious. The direction, clear. Not an one ounce of hesitation in our bones.

I don't know about you, were I in those first disciples' shoes, I would have had some questions before following:

What is the lamb of God? How do you know Jesus is it?

Where are we headed? And, how long are we planning to be gone?

Many of you know that in college I studied abroad in Thailand.

- Before I went, I attended an informational meeting, & I filled out an application.
- Then, they called me to see whether I'd be a good fit; I was surprised to find that I didn't quite meet their expectations.
- One of their requirements was that the applicants not have grades that were too perfect. They informed me that straights A's usually meant that a student was a perfectionist who needed things to go their way.
- It took another 30 minutes on the phone for me to convince them that I was not THAT kind of a straight A student.

It strikes me that the disciples are making a life-altering decision here, and not only is there no informational meeting, but there appear to be 0 prerequisites in order to follow.

- Jesus doesn't stop them and ask them about how they've been serving the community lately, or about how often they attend the temple.

He does, however, have one question: What are you looking for? **[WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?]**

- Um, where are you staying? They respond. It doesn't quite answer the question! Maybe, they're a bit flustered by Jesus' star power: What!? The Lamb of God asked us a question?! Is he talking to us!!!???

Or maybe they're not quite able to get their words out right, but they mean to say that whatever they are looking for, they hope they can find by hanging out with Jesus.

→ Either way, it's clear that these first disciples don't have everything figured out just yet, and, that Jesus doesn't seem to mind too much.

Sometimes we falsely imagine that the people in the Bible were more put together than we are.

- Or when we look around at people at church, we might see a lot of people who seem to be doing a much better job with all this God stuff that we are.
- Somehow our own failings come into focus quite clearly.
- And it's a slippery slope from there to imagine that we don't have enough faith or enough of whatever else is required to really make a difference for God.

But next time you are feeling small and empty remember that God used tiny David to slay Goliath, and empty vessels are perfect for God to fill. **[GOD DOESN'T CALL THE EQUIPPED, HE EQUIPS THE CALLED]**

It has become a cliché, but God truly does not call us because we are already ready for the job. He doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. And if he's going to call us, he's also going to give us all that we need to follow.

But actually following is far from simple in our daily lives. We've got to listen **[LISTENING HEADPHONES]** if we're going to figure out how God wants us to serve him.

In my life I find that distractions are one of the main reasons why I don't always end up doing what Jesus wants.

Martin Luther has said that every morning as we wash our faces or brush our teeth we should remember our baptism and make the sign of the cross. I haven't been doing that, but I like his idea, of building faith practices into the stuff we already do every day.

→So what I've started doing is as I brush my teeth each morning, I just ask God: Show me what you want me to do today, and give me the courage to do it.

After a month of doing that, I start brushing my teeth and the question automatically pops into my mind—that question helps put me in the right frame of mind to be listening for God throughout the day.

Part of the reason I started doing that, though, was because I had an experience where I was too distracted and focused on myself to hear from God.

Ironically, I was writing a sermon. It was a Saturday morning & I had just poured my coffee and plopped down in my big comfy chair where I like to write sermons.

That day, though I was feeling pressured, because I wasn't sure if I had enough time to finish the sermon. I knew I really needed to get to work.

So of course, as soon as I opened the computer, the phone rang.

It was a pastor friend. "Do you have a few minutes?" she asked. **[EARS PLUGGED]** "I'm working on the sermon, what do you need?" I said.

- She told me that a friend had been abused. They were coming to Marshall. Could I help?

And maybe you can name a time when you felt God's tug but didn't follow it.

Fortunately for us, with Jesus the 2nd chances are endless.

So here's what I said: My house is too messy right now to have anyone over, but you could go to the church. I told her I'd be busy most of the day working on the sermon, but I could stop in briefly. I hung up the phone and got right back to work.

But try as I might, the next sentence of my sermon just wouldn't come. Instead, these thoughts started running through my mind:

- Your house is big. You have more than enough space—share it. You have a fridge full of food—share it. You have a listening ear—share it.

I know that was God speaking to me because he was pulling me in a direction I wouldn't have chosen on my own. I needed a push, and that's exactly what God gave me.

Did you notice in the gospel that once they start following, the disciples aren't focused on themselves—they all get so excited about Jesus that they run out to share what they've found with their friends! Jesus has a way of reorienting us. **[HELPING HAND]**

And that's precisely what happened to me: suddenly I was entirely convicted that I needed to do anything I could to help. I called my friend right back. This time, I actually asked: What do you need? How can I help? I ended up spending much of my day taking this woman for lunch and a shower and nap.

I had felt like I didn't have enough time or energy to help. And yet how often is it true that helping someone else ends up filling us up. I may have resisted it a bit, but as he often does, Jesus got me focused less on me and more on helping someone else.

And whatever you're looking for today, if you want to follow Jesus, that's a good place to start. Amen.