2nd Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP
West Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 4: 18-22 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, meding their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him.

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

The Lord's call to discipleship is simple and direct. Follow Me! If one fact stands out in the call of these four fishermen to discipleship, it is this: they were not played upon, emotionally or psychologically. They were not snapped up in a moment of high enthusiasm or in a mood of desperation. They were simply called. Follow Me! The Voice that called to them is the Voice of Authority; and they can do nothing less than follow Him.

The Lord's call to discipleship is an act of grace. There are no likely candidates for discipleship. The first disciples had no outstanding qualities or qualifications that made them fit for discipleship. They were just simple, uneducated, Galilean fishermen. They held out no high aspiration for themselves. They made no claim to greatness. They did not in themselves choose to be disciples of Jesus. They were called. And later on Jesus found it necessary to remind them of this fact: You did not choose Me, but I chose you!

One is reminded in this connection of the calling of the Old Testament prophets. They were men to whom the Word of the LORD came, without their will, and often against their will. We hear of men like Moses and Jeremiah who went into their prophetic office reluctantly and only after a struggle. They were too young, they said, or they were stammerers; or they simply ran away, like Jonah. To none of the prophets did the call come in response to self-preparation or mood-making. In the last analysis, the Word that came to them simply overrode them and left them with no alternative but to obey. Amos the prophet once said that men no more choose to be prophets than they choose to be afraid when the lion roars: The lion has roared: who will not fear? The LORD GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?

The calling of St. Paul to discipleship is a good example. The initiativ was not his; he was to the last a blasphemer, persecutor, and insulter of Christ and His church. He speaks repeatedly of the grace of God which called him. He was on his way to Damascus when the light of God's grace came flooding down upon him. There he met Christ. And from that marvelous moment onward, Paul became a different man. Tirelessly, endlessly, he followed the way that Christ led until his head was placed on an executioner's block in Rome. Paul never got over the love of Christ for him - of all people. He loved me, and gave Himself for me! Paul lived and breathed this love of Jesus for him. He never stopped talking about it. All over the world he carried the same message: I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified! Nothing else mattered to ~~Paul now~~ him. In spite of shipwreck, persecution, famine, beatings, stoning, prison - Paul kept going and he kept talking. People must know how God loved the world, how He gave His only Son, how Jesus took the sins of the world upon Himself, suffered and died for them that they might have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Paul knew that wherever this Gospel was preached, Jesus was still calling men to discipleship with the words: Follow Me! Paul knew that this Gospel was the power of God unto salvation! And so he literally became a fool, a madman for Christ. For him the words of Christ had come true: If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it.

The Lord's call to discipleship demands complete and total obedience. When Jesus called, Follow Me! Peter and Andrew, James and John were expected to obey. And they did obey, and ~~that~~ they obeyed immediately. They followed Him. They left their boats, their nets, their fathers and their fathers' house. The life of discipleship is not the hero-worship we would pay to a good master, but obedience to the Son of God! Nothing dare come before or between the disciple and his Lord. The disciple who refuses to obey ceases to be a disciple. Follow Me! says Jesus, and there can be no excuse for not following. The Lord's anger is kindled against

those who offer weak excuses like those found in today's Gospel, and say: I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused; or, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused; or, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

This is the reason why many would-be Christians sooner or later find their faith resting on quicksand. They are not willing to forsake all and follow Him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer goes right to the point in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, when he says: No one should be surprised at the difficulty of faith, if there is some part of his life where he is consciously resisting or disobeying the commandment of Jesus. Is there some part of your life which you are refusing to surrender at His behest, some sinful passion, maybe, or some animosity, some hope, perhaps your ambition or your reason? If so, you must not be surprised that you have not received the Holy Spirit, that prayer is difficult, or that your request for faith remains unanswered. Go rather and be reconciled with your brother, renounce the sin which holds you fast - and then you will recover your faith! If you dismiss the Word of God's command, you will not receive His Word of grace. How can you hope to enter into communion with Him what at some point in your life you are running away from Him? The man who disobeys cannot believe, for only he who obeys can believe.

Christ calls you away from yourself. If any man man would come after Me, let Him deny Himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. Self-denial can only mean knowing Christ and ceasing to know ourselves, seeing Him only, and not the road of suffering and rejection that lies ahead. Christ calls you to a new life. It is a life that is given to God with the same abandonment with which ~~Christ~~ He gave His life for a lost world. It is a life that not only follows Christ's example, but derives its power from the Cross where the lifeblood of Christ was poured out for all that is wrong with us, in order to make everything right. He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again!

Christ calls you away from your most intimate friends, even the members of your own family. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And again He says: If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Christ claims absolute priority for Himself. The life of Abraham is a classic example. God called him, and he left his friends and his father's house to go into a land he knew nothing about. He became a stranger and a sojourner. Later on he was called by God to offer his own son Isaac as a sacrifice. He took God at His word and he obeyed. And it was only when he took the knife and was about to slay his son that the Angel of the Lord called from heaven, saying, Abraham, Abraham....Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, for Me. Abraham received Isaac back again, but from that time on he had his son in quite a new way. He understood now that Isaac was not his to have and to hold, but that he was in a very real sense a gift of God. Abraham possessed Isaac now through God Himself.

Christ calls you away from your possessions. The disciples left their boats and their homes and followed Him. The story of the rich young ruler is a case in point. He had his eye on the great god Success. He was in love with himself and with what he had - wealth, position, and social advantages. He was in love with the wrong things. He had the will to get but not the will to give. One thing thou lackest, Jesus informed him. Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me. Like so many today the young man could not bear to depart with what he had and recklessly throw himself into the gracious care and protection of the Savior. He went away sorrowing. He did not possess his possessions; his possessions possessed him. Without a doubt, he was concerned about his future, his financial security, his ability to buy the finer things in life; and he passed by his opportunity for discipleship.

Jesus says, Follow Me! Surrender yourself to Me! Spend every day with Me! Do, today, that which you are sure I want you to do, and forsake that which I hate! He will settle for nothing less. As St. John put it: Love not the world, niehter the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him....And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. When everything else is dead and gone, Christ will endure. He is the life! Only those who have lived in Him will love forever. God grant that it may be said of us, as it was said of those first disciples: And they followed Him.

Amen.