

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date:
Sermon Title:
Scripture:
Pastor:

Follow Me

There are many things that can be said about me, some of them good, I hope, but one thing that is absolutely certain, incontrovertible, is that I am a terrible person to follow.

I don't actually mean that in any big spiritual leadership way, I mean quite literally that I am a terrible person to follow: If you and I are parked outside Church, and I say to you 'hey, we're going to go grab a bite to eat at Ralph and Rich's in Bridgeport, wanna join us?' and you say 'I don't know where that is' and I say "Follow me," that, frankly, is going to be a bad idea. Here's what will happen. I'll get on 95 and I'll start going too fast, and much as I like you, I'll forget that you're trying to stick with me. Then I'll think to myself, 'do I take the connector? no, I don't think so. No, wait, I do' and I'll veer quickly into the exit lane, while you, having just caught up to me, suddenly discover that I'm heading off, and have to cross three lanes of traffic to keep following me. Once off the highway, I will once again scratch my head to remember exactly how to go, I'll turn right where I should have turned left, go around the block with you trying to keep up, and then I'll just barely catch the end of a yellow light, leaving you stranded on red. I'll eventually get to the restaurant get out of the car, and say "well, where are they? I thought they were right behind us!" I have done this to church people so many times that the last time we had a women's retreat and carpooled down together, my friend Heath Smith went around telling the other women, "whatever you do, don't follow Alida." Which is kind of funnily ironic to say about your pastor, I guess. But Heath has been stranded at a red light just one too many times.

So you want to know the words, the phrase, that Jesus said to people more than any other? You've probably figured it out. **Follow me**, he said. You there, sitting alone, you, follow me. You, over there, listening in the corner, come on, follow me. You -- who just asked me a question about life and God and love -- I'll give you the answer. Follow me. Follow me. Over and over, these simple words, to dozens, hundreds of people: Follow me, said Jesus.

If you've already been flipping through your bulletin this morning, which I'm sure you have, you've noticed that we actually have a cartoon section today. Or, **a** cartoon, anyway. It's courtesy of a church member who zipped it to me this week to give me a chuckle, and it did, but then I started thinking about it. If you don't have a bulletin in front of you right now, the cartoon is Jesus sitting on a park bench with a young man, and he's saying "No, I'm *not* talking about Twitter, I literally want you to follow me."

So I laughed when I saw it, thought "good one," and *then* I thought 'well, what **is** the difference?' You follow someone on Twitter, here's what happens: you get updates on their life. You find out what they're doing, things that don't necessarily affect you. *I'm sitting here getting my nails done*, someone tweets. You find out what their plans are, plans that don't necessarily include you. *Going to the Cape this afternoon*. It might be interesting, but it's not your life.

Following Jesus **COULD** be like that. You **could** check the stories, the Gospel tweets, see what Jesus is up to, but not necessarily be affected by it. You could learn about what his plans are, but not necessarily join in on them. You could look it as a life that's interesting, but not yours. Yeah, you could follow Jesus like on Twitter. You could. Or, and this is why we're here, or you could **FOLLOW** Jesus. You could *really* follow Jesus. Which is a lot less like Twitter and a lot more like getting in a car and following someone who knows where they're going when *you* don't exactly know.

'Cause here's the thing. If you're following someone, if you're REALLY following someone, the reason you're doing it at all is because you're not really sure how to get there yourself. You don't know exactly which way to go. When you say to someone, I'll follow you, that's you saying "I don't know the way, but I trust that you do, and I trust that you'll lead me well." Being willing to follow means being willing to say, to admit, that you can't get there by yourself. There was a *reason* Jesus said 'follow me' to people more than anything else he said. It's because he knew, he *knew*, that there were a lot of people who didn't know which way to go, who weren't even sure *where* they were trying to get to let alone the best route there. "Follow me", Jesus said, because he knew that he was surrounded by people who were lost. Really lost.

That's why he talked to Levi, the tax collector. That's why he went up to Levi and said, hey, friend, why don't you follow me? He knew he was talking to someone who'd made some pretty lousy choices about *who* to be and *how* to be. He knew he was talking to someone who needed to head a different direction altogether. He knew he was talking to someone **lost**. "Follow me, Levi," said Jesus – come on buddy, follow me. And Levi got up from his little tax collector booth, where he'd been hurting people and extorting money and doing everything bad, he got up and said "Okay, I'll follow you now. I'll follow you."

Did not make Jesus popular. Did not make him look good. *All you ever do is hang out with sinners*, the priests said, *all you do is tell the wrong king of people to follow you*. And Jesus said simply this, “If you’re well, you don’t need a doctor, right? I’m here for everyone else.” I’m here for the lost, he was saying. I’m here for the ones who don’t know the way there, or even where THERE is.

Truth is, we’re all Levi. We’re all folks that need someone to show us the way. For every moment in our lives when we think we’ve got it all figured out, and the path is clear, there are ten other moments when we’re thinking “what am I doing? where am I going? what’s the point, and who am I, anyway?” For every moment that the road is straight ahead, there are ten other moments when we can’t figure left or right, or we’re stranded at the red light while the ones who seem to know what they’re doing zip right on through ahead of us. Moments of doubt, times of fear, confusing changes, mornings when we look in the mirror and think “I could be doing this better,” those are all the times when we are very definitely Levi. And there are a *lot* of those times. And we need someone to say, “Hey, this way. Hey, it’ll be all right. Hey, you’re on the right track. Follow me. Follow me.”

Which is – again -- why we’re here. Every last one of us, no matter what it is that made us wander in the door this morning, we are all here because we know, deep down we know, that we need someone to show the way. And we know that the best person to do that for us is this man who had love all figured out. We know the best person to do that for us is Jesus. Yeah. We’re here to follow Jesus.

Let me close with a little story about my parents. Those of you who’ve been hearing me preach over the years have heard a lot of stories about my folks, who love nothing more than to go on walks, *major* walks, I mean, with backpacks strapped on and freeze-dried food and compasses. Last May they did the Border walk, through the Scottish counties bordering England. And the walk ended like this – it ended on the coastline, looking out to the isle of Lindisfarne, where Saint Aidan had founded a little community of Christians in the 7th century.

And you could actually walk to the Island, but only if you followed the footsteps of the pilgrims that had gone before you. You could walk out there, when the low tide was just right; you could make your way past the bogs and through the waters if you followed the path just right. If you followed the path that the Christ-followers before you had been shown, all the faithful who had trekked out to that holy Island to know God and find Christ and be together in prayer. And so that was how my parents’ journey ended – shoes in hand, stepping barefoot through the waters, following the ones who had followed Christ. Which is to say, really, following Christ.

That’s what we’re here to do. Like generations of pilgrims before us, we are here

to be led, around the bogs, and through the waters, and across the sands and wherever it is we end up going, we are here to be led to the place we long to be: where our hearts are at rest, where we know ourselves to be loved and loving, in that place of faith for which our souls yearn.

Follow me there, Jesus says.
Follow me.
Amen.