

“Follow me” —Jesus

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "**Follow me.**"*

John 1:43 NRSV

Similarly, we have stories in the other gospels of Jesus calling the disciples to follow him

Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew "**Follow me.**"

Then James and John—also fishermen "**Follow me.**"

Matthew, the tax collector "**Follow me.**"

To the rich young ruler... *Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, **follow me.**"* Mark 10:21 NRSV

To another Jesus said, "**Follow me.**" But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Luke 9:59 NRSV

*Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and **follow me.**"* Mark 8:34 NRSV

*My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they **follow me.*** John 10:27 NRSV

*Whoever serves me must **follow me,** and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.* John 12:26 NRSV

After Jesus death and resurrection, Jesus reunites with the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, where Peter and Jesus take a walk—...*Jesus said to Peter, "**Follow me.**" Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "... what is that to you? **Follow me!**"* John 21:19-22 NRSV

There are times when we have a conversation and the assumptions are all wrong

I'm talking about one thing and you are talking about another thing

But we both think that the thing you are talking about is the same as what I'm talking about

Sometimes those conversations can be quite comical and other times problematic

Increasingly, the disciples don't understand what Jesus is talking about and they are confused

Disciples see him as the Messiah—who comes as an earthly king to overthrow the rulers

Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God—heaven come to earth to transform all of life

In John 13 and following chapters, Jesus is talking to his disciples

They gathered in the upper room for a meal together at Passover

Jesus surprised them, getting up from the table to wash their feet—an act of love and compassion

Shockingly, Jesus says that one of them will betray him

Mysteriously, Jesus releases Judas to go and do what he has chosen to do

Then Jesus confronts them with the news that he is going away and will leave them

Jesus understands their confusion, calling them “little children”—John 13:33-14:14

Jesus says he is leaving them and when they say they will follow him—he says they can't come with him
Not this time!

They've heard this before—but it was easy to think that Jesus meant other people couldn't go
Like in John 7:32-36 when he is talking with the Pharisees and Chief Priests

But they were his chosen disciples—they could go with him—always

They hadn't yet figured out who would be in what position in his government

But they would be there in leadership positions

This can't be—Peter insists that he will follow him anywhere that Jesus is going

Peter even vows that he will lay down his life for Jesus

In fact, Peter tries to intervene when they arrest Jesus—

Peter cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave

But now Jesus tells Peter the truth—he will deny him 3 times

—Jesus doesn't say it as a rebuke, nor is Jesus angry or in despair

But Jesus simply states the facts—on that night when everything goes wrong

They've arrested Jesus and are planning to crucify him

When life falls apart and Peter is scared—he denies Jesus 3 times

Jesus knows they can't go with him—they aren't ready yet and they have work to do

The disciples can't come—but they are given a new commandment—to love

They are to love each other the same way that Jesus loves them

And that God, who sent Jesus, loves them

For now, this must be their focus

Makes me think of 1 Corinthians 13—I love what it says in the Message Bible

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 MSG

Love will be the way that the world recognizes God

They have been followers of Jesus—traveling with him, living with him, teaching with him

But always with Jesus and following his instructions

Now Jesus says he is leaving—and he tells them that they must carry on

The way to do that is to establish themselves as a people that love each other

Remember that this is a diverse group of people chosen by Jesus as disciples

They had widely divergent political views—a Zealot, tax collector, and fishermen

As some have suggested—Jesus separated them when arguments got heated

Now—Jesus knows that they must transfer their devotion from Jesus to each other

Their work is not done—they have a future—but love is the way

He knows they don't get it so he tells them not to be troubled—and to trust God and Jesus

In John 14:1—many translations use the word “believe”—“Believe in God, believe also in me”

But NIV gets it right this time and uses “trust” as does the Message Bible

It isn't about head knowledge or beliefs—it is all about putting our trust in God/Jesus

Jesus is leaving them and going back to God—this place of eternity that is now—preparing for them to come

He speaks in metaphors of a dwelling place where they can all live together

It is large, full of many “rooms” and full of diverse peoples—all those who follow Jesus

Actually, God's dwelling place is as diverse and full of people as the people God dwells with now

Later Jesus expands on this, *“Those who love me will [obey my teaching^{NIV}], and my Father will*

love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. John 14:23 NRSV

Then Jesus says, *"You know the place where I am going"*—as if it was a settled knowing

Actually Jesus has told them all along how to do this—*Follow me!* —I will show you and lead you
We've done life together these past few years—but always I've simply called you to follow me
It will continue to be the same—follow me—do the things I've told you—Listen for the next steps
Following means continuing to live out the things Jesus taught them

But they are still confused and ask again—Thomas asks the question this time

"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus tells them simply—It's me—I'm the Way—follow me and follow my ways...

I am the way, and the truth, and the life

Remember all that I've taught you—remember to love one another

Remember to serve each other and to care for each other

Take care of the widows, the poor, and the alien among you

Don't condemn others—love them

Heal people—physically—but also heal their broken hearts

Don't let rules cause you to miss loving people and meeting them where they are

See the good in people—love your neighbor—even love your enemies

Remember that I said not to turn the temple into a money making enterprise

Remember that I said you can't worship both God and mammon (—greed/love of money)

Remember to invite everyone to the banquet—even the poor and homeless

Retell the stories of our time together and remember what I told you—then tell others

Write the stories and teachings down—memorize them—talk about them—learn from them

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

John 14:6-7 NRSV

The church has made this into a formula...

Jesus is the way to know God—that means you must believe in Jesus death and resurrection

We have put the emphasis on the head knowledge, saying that without it you're condemned

I think it is much bigger than that—Jesus was never impressed by formulas or rules

Jesus is much more interested in the heart—in people who follow after him

In people who live out the ways of Jesus

Following Jesus is way more than belief in Jesus—it is living out the ways of Jesus

Jesus' mission statement: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Luke 4:18-19 NRSV

This is our mission statement as well—work we are to be about

Too often, the church has derailed from this purpose

Making it all about getting people saved—as if that was all that mattered

Forgetting about the poor, the captives, the oppressed—the outcast

Judging people unworthy, rather than following Jesus and simply loving

We cannot compromise on this—to be followers of Jesus is to do it his way

Jesus is saying that we follow him when we do life his way—following Jesus' teachings and ways

In doing this, Jesus reminds us that Jesus and God are the same—you know one, you know the other

You've seen what Jesus is about—God has the same agenda

You know one—you know the other!

This time it is Philip who asks the question, "*Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.*"

Jesus wants them to understand this—so yet again, he explains that Jesus and the Father are One
Believe me when I tell you this—or at least believe the miracles themselves

But Jesus shifts from the miracles that he has performed in their presence

To the work they will do in Jesus' name—after he is gone

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. John 14:12-14 NRSV

Jesus is leaving them—but the work is not done

They must carry on—doing Jesus work on earth—doing it Jesus' way

In this—Jesus is *the way, and the truth, and the life*

It is *our way—our truth—our life* as followers of Jesus