

Cross Walk:

5/5 in Series

Follow Me

Matthew 16:24-28

04 10 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Scripture: Matthew 16:24-28**Introduction**

Bert Lance tells the story about a “*Help Wanted*” ad that sought a special person for a unique job. The applicant had to be at least six feet tall. The person needed to have graduated from college with honors. Finally, the position required someone with a high spirit of adventure.

On the day the ad appeared, a scrawny little man came to the office. He appeared totally unqualified for the position, but the secretary asked him the required questions:

"Are you at least six feet tall?"

"Nope, I'm just five foot two with my shoes on."

"Well, did you graduate from college with honors?"

"Nah, to be honest, I'm a grade school drop out."

"Well, then, do you at least have a spirit of adventure in your heart?"

"No, actually, I'm probably the world's worst coward."

Thoroughly confused by now, the secretary laid down her pen and said, "Sir, you knew the qualifications of the job. Why in the world did you come in?"

"Oh," the man responded, "I just came by to tell you **not to count on me!**"

I. Wanted: Christian Disciples

Suppose today's newspaper ran a “*Help Wanted*” ad seeking potential Christians. What would the advertisement say? Who is God looking for in applicants? What are the pay, perks, commissions, and vacation? How would a detailed job description read?

The twelve disciples knew none of these details when they first signed on to follow Jesus. If they had read the fine print of the contract, then they might have reconsidered. Their **first job offer** SEEMED simple enough. Jesus called to them, "*Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" So they left family, friends, vocation, and avocation to follow in the footsteps of this itinerant preacher.

And what an adventure it turned out to be! The things they saw and heard! Jesus exorcised demons, gave sight to the blind, pulled the lame to their feet, raised the dead, walked on water, and transformed sinners into saints. He proclaimed to the crowds: "*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the gospel.*" It was such an exciting journey as they followed in Jesus' footsteps.

Then one day outside the city of **Caesarea Philippi**, Jesus changed the disciples' job description without any advance notice. Jesus explained the small asterisk at the bottom of the contract that read: "*And other duties as assigned.*"

It began innocently enough with a casual question. Jesus asked the disciples, "*Who do people say I am?*" The disciples repeated the rumors they had heard: "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets.*"

Then in one of those moments that change life forever, Jesus pressed, "*But what about you? Who do you say that I am?*" In the pregnant silence that followed, Peter gave birth to this answer: "*You are the Christ, the son of the living God!*"

Jesus was indeed the Christ, the messiah, the promised one sent by God to save humanity. But he was like no Christ the people ever expected. The Jewish religious leaders expected a military messiah, a political prince, a religious ruler. They could not have been more wrong.

Jesus immediately began to **redefine** the messiah's true identity. For the first time, he spoke plainly about his upcoming death. The disciples were horrified. They expected a crown and not a cross, a parade and not a death march. If this was what the future held for their leader, what about themselves?

A hasty meeting was held and Simon Peter elected as spokesperson. He took Jesus to one side and began to rebuke him! In one of the harshest statements in Scripture, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*"

II. A Disciple's Job Description

Then Jesus revealed to his followers the true nature of **Christian discipleship**. The Lord declared: "*If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.***" He described a radical lifestyle of sacrifice and commitment. Suddenly the disciples began to realize the true nature of Christ's call.

During the past weeks, we have examined the demands of discipleship. We began with self-denial. Then we explored taking up the cross. Today we come to the third part of the Christian's job description: **following Jesus**.

"Follow me." This call is at the very heart of discipleship. By definition, the term "*discipleship*" is relational in nature—a disciple follows a master. Christians follow in the footsteps of Jesus, declaring him Savior and Lord.

Another title given to Jesus was "rabbi" or "teacher." The apostles were students at the feet of Jesus. In contemporary language, we might describe this relationship as "mentee and mentor" or "player and coach."

All of these analogies describe a relationship of **authority and submission**. Disciples submit to the authority of their master. Students learn from the accumulated wisdom of the teacher. A mentee follows the example of a mentor. Players are shaped by their coaches.

Discipleship describes both our **posture and place** in relationship to God. Our posture is one of submission: we submit to the lordship of Christ. Our place is behind our Master, following in the footsteps of the one who leads.

Maintaining our proper posture and place, however, is a constant struggle in our relationship with God. Our sinful, human nature makes us want to lead rather than

follow, to lord rather than serve, to command rather than obey. It began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve's original sin sought "*MY will*" rather than "*THY will.*" We live with the results today in our fallen world.

We've seen the disciples' response when Jesus talked about his coming death. Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, "*Never, Lord!*" Christ's response is quite telling. He said: "*Get BEHIND ME, Satan!*" You see, Simon Peter was attempting to lead rather than follow, to command rather than obey. He had forgotten that his place was behind Jesus and not in front of him.

Follow Me

"*Follow me.*" Christ's command should have been very familiar to the disciples. Remember, that's how the whole adventure had begun. Peter, Andrew, James and John were all minding their own business, busy at the family trade of fishing. Then Jesus came to the shore and called them to a new vocation, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

But their probationary period was over. Jesus now spelled out the job description in fuller detail. This wasn't a carefree lark any more. It involved self-denial and sacrifice. A cross waited at journey's end. And the disciples heard that same familiar call again, "*Follow me.*"

The original disciples learned that the call to follow Jesus is not a one time decision. It is a choice that each believer must make over and over again. The Christian pilgrimage is a lifelong journey. Certainly there are memorable milestones that dramatically change our lives. However, most of life is lived between the milestones in the ordinary and every day. On our cross walk as Christian disciples, we encounter countless **cross roads**. Discipleship requires us to make daily decisions about who we will follow.

Here's a truth we sometimes forget: even the smallest of choices add up quickly. Decisions build on each other and create the future. We are who we are today because of yesterday. All of our past decisions have led us to this point.

Our daily decisions also become self-reinforcing. Practice becomes habit becomes lifestyle becomes identity. The more we choose for Christ, the more we learn to choose for Christ. The more we ignore God's call, the fainter it becomes. Discipleship grows out of the daily decisions to make to follow Jesus. Following Christ in the good times of sunshine and light prepares us to follow in the bad times of darkness and night.

Several times in the past I've had the chance to raft the **Nantahala River** with the *Nantahala Outdoor Company*. You put in upstream and drift with the current. Most of the trip is down a lazy river with occasional rocks and rapids. It's a relaxing way to spend a half day.

Near the end of the journey, however, there is a dangerous Class 2 rapid. The river shoots between two rocks and then drops into a boiling cauldron of water with a terrible undertow. Even experienced river people have lost their lives there.

The guides pull all of the rafts over to the shore and give everyone a chance to walk downstream to view the rapids. Then each person is given a choice: walk or ride. If you choose to plunge ahead, however, the guide goes with you.

Each day Jesus calls us, "*Follow me.*" And we choose whether to obey or ignore God's call in our lives. "*Come, follow me.*" Jesus doesn't reveal what will happen next. The Spirit does not even tell us where we are headed.

But then as most good travelers discover, it is not so much the journey as your companions that matter. Trust in the guide. Follow the leader. Those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus will arrive where God intended.

Mirror Exercise

This morning let's try a simple exercise that illustrates the nature of Christian discipleship. I need a volunteer. Select a "volunteer." The name of this game is **Mirror**. I'm going to put my hands up like this. Put hands up with palms facing out towards the volunteer. The instructions are simple. I'm going to move my hands around and you're going to try to follow me. Understand?

1) Great. Ready? Okay, close your eyes! Seriously, close your eyes and keep them closed. Now, let's begin. Follow me. Move hands around and encourage the other person to mirror your actions—with eyes still closed. Of course, the volunteer cannot see what to do.

Okay, open your eyes now. That didn't go so well, did it? Why not? The reason is clear: your eyes were closed and you couldn't see what to do.

2) So let's make it easier. We will try the exercise again, but this time you can keep your eyes OPEN.

Ready? Here we go. Follow me. Move hands around again. Slowly at first and then more quickly. The person will be able to keep up at first but will soon fall behind.

Hmmm, that was certainly better but still not great. Even with your eyes open, you had a hard time mirroring all of my actions.

3) Okay, let's try it a third time. Put your hands up. The leader interlocks his hands with the volunteer. Relax. Follow me. The leader moves his hands around with the volunteer's hands. Great—you're a natural at this! By holding on to my hands, you were able to follow effortlessly. Let's give our volunteer a hand!

Special thanks to the Reverend Dee Dee Lawson for providing instructions for the "Mirror" exercise.

Jesus calls to each of us, "*Follow me.*" Sometimes we close our eyes and go our own way. Other times we depend upon human effort rather than divine guidance. Disciples learn to hold tight to Jesus. Through daily obedience and commitment, we discover how to follow the Lord in all of our ways.

Conclusion

Wanted: Christian disciples. Personal experience required. References essential: must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Job Description:

- ❖ Deny self.
- ❖ Take up cross.
- ❖ Follow Jesus.

No vacation. No retirement plan. But the benefits are out of this world.

This is the job description for Christian discipleship. We hear Christ's words echo in our ears every day, "*Follow me.*" I invite you today to answer the question: can God count on you?