

“Come, Follow Me”

Introduction: “Come, follow me.” In most situations, most of us are glad to hear such an invitation. As a child newly moved to town, we want to know where the playground is. “Come, follow me,” a child who lives next door says, and gladly we go. As a teenager, we want to know where the best party is on Saturday night. “Come, follow me,” a classmate says, and gladly we go. As a new employee, we might want to know where the best lunch spot is. “Come, follow me,” a co-worker says, and away we merrily go.

In our passage this morning we’ll hear that same invitation, “Come, follow me.” They are words uttered by Jesus, but they’re not met with gladness. Instead, they are met with resistance and sadness. Why did this man, after his encounter with Jesus, not want to follow him? What we’ll see is that his heart was divided. As we explore what caused this division, it will cause us to ask whether there are divisions in our own hearts that might get in the way of following the One who has come to lead us into the life that is truly. [READ]

I. The Man and His Request

A. Who is this man who falls at Jesus’ feet? From Matthew’s account we learn that he was young. Luke tells us additionally that he was a ruler. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each inform us that he was a man of great wealth, hence, he’s come to be identified as the rich, young, ruler. In other words, here was a man who had it all – possessions, power, prestige. Or did he? Looking closely at three items in v. 17 leads us to think again.

1. First, Mark tells us that the man came running. Jesus had just finished spending time with families and their little children, and the scene might have looked something like our fellowship hour with kids running everywhere, parents running after them, and the rest of us clutching our coffee cups hoping nothing spills! Through this crowd of little ones the man came running, even probably elbowing people out of the way he was so anxious to get to Jesus.

2. Second, when he finally got to Jesus, the man fell on his knees. This was a man who had probably never been on his knees before anyone, ever, in his life. He had servants who got on their knees to do things for him, and people who got on their knees to pay him respect, but he had never kneeled until he came before this Jesus who he considered to be greater than he.

3. Third, breathless and on his knees, the young man made his request: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” It turns out that maybe he didn’t have it all. Yes, he owned his own company. Yes, he drove a sports car during the week and an SUV on the weekends. Yes, he had an apartment in Back Bay, a home on the Vineyard, and a condo at Killington. He could buy anything he desired. Many in the crowd would have easily exchanged places with him. But for whatever reason, the man had come to realize that something big was missing from his portfolio of assets. It concerned eternal life. “Where do I find it? How do I get it?” He was desperate to know.

II. The Response of Jesus

A. In response, Jesus invited the man to consider for a moment who he thought Jesus actually was – a good man or good like only God is good – and then he puts arms and legs on the

discussion by listing the commandments having to do with love of neighbor (#'s 5-10). The man barely pauses before offering that he's well aware of them and that keeping them has been child's play. "Teacher, I've been good since I was a young boy" the man declares to Jesus.

B. In response to this declaration comes the most poignant moment in the whole encounter: "Jesus looked at him and loved him." I wish I could have seen that look! In actual fact, Jesus should have looked at him and laughed at him, for the man was totally deluded. If, as Jesus teaches, murder includes anger, adultery includes lust, and stealing includes holding back from those with needs, just to name a few, no one has kept these commandments. So, Jesus should have said, "Who do you think you're kidding?!" But instead, he looked, and he loved.

C. Jesus loved him because that's the way God is. No matter what our shortcomings, our failures, or our deluded thoughts about ourselves, God always begins by loving us. Even the 10 commandments begin by telling us how God has loved us: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). Before telling us what we might do, he wants us to know who we are – beloved children of God.

D. And that can be a hard truth for us to assimilate given that we, as well as this rich, young, ruler, live in a society that measures us by our achievements. It's worth noting, then, that leading into this young man's quest we see Jesus spending time with children and declaring that to enter the kingdom of God – where this man wants to be – takes receiving it like a child (vv. 15f):

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Another way to put this is that we must walk away from our compulsion for Doing, which chokes out the awareness that we are incredibly, and unconditionally loved by God, and rest in our Being – in who God in Christ has made us, before we have done a thing. Resting in the arms of Jesus is a good picture of such. I've also been thinking about this in relationship to retirement. The struggle, as I've learned through talking with others, is that when you stop what you've been doing for so many years, you no longer have achievements with which to be measured, and you can begin to question your value.

E. Interestingly, and challengingly, Jesus invites this man to sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor. Essentially, he was to walk away from finding his value in what he'd been able to accumulate, and begin to discover his value by simply following Jesus and resting in his love.

What, we might want to ask, are the achievements, the people, the possessions that we find directing our lives? What don't we want to walk away from? Importantly, as much as Jesus loves to talk about money, that isn't the primary issue here. The primary issue is what we think we need to do and have in order to be "whole." It could be different for each of us. A couple of additional encounters that Jesus had demonstrate this.

1. For a religious leader named Nicodemus, the issue was his reputation. The credentials he had in the circles in which he operated had become his kingdom. Jesus told him, It's why he wanted to meet Jesus under the cover of darkness. There, Jesus told him that the ladder he was climbing was leaning against the wrong wall. It was leading nowhere good. He needed to start from scratch, to be born again, to receive a status that did not hang on his own achievements (Jn. 3).

2. Or take the woman Jesus encountered in broad daylight at a well in Samaria. Her issue, as Jesus dug around a bit, was a string of affairs through which she had been trying to satisfy her deepest thirst. Jesus told her that she had been drawing water from the wrong well and that she needed to satisfy her thirst through the living water he alone could provide.

“Sell all you have.” “You must be born again.” “Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.” Each approach is different, but each time Jesus was concerned with what needed to go, with what was dividing their hearts, blocking his kingdom from coming in their lives, and preventing them from following him to receive all that he had to offer.

III. The Sadness of the Man

A. You see, Jesus knows that our hearts cannot be divided. He knows that we cannot serve two masters. Interestingly, the man knew this as well for the encounter ends with him walking away sad. He just couldn't let go. His possessions possessed him. He couldn't get them off the throne to make room for Jesus. And so, his encounter ends in a rather gut-wrenching way:

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Don't you just want to shake this guy and scream, “no, don't walk away, you don't know what you're missing!”

But maybe that might lead us each to ask: Where might we be inclined to walk away? What might we be missing? To what might we be clinging? Can you see the look of love that is coming to you from Jesus? Will you trust that if you follow him, that if, as our closing hymnwriter, Fanny Crosby puts it, by the power of grace divine our will be lost in Thine, that he will lead you, not into sadness but to the life that is truly life?