

Worship Service for January 17th: 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

- **Old Testament:** 1 Samuel 3:1-15
- **New Testament:** John 1:43-51
- **Psalms:** Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Announcements:

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on February 3rd. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying the book of James and also discussing our Sunday sermon and how we can apply it to our daily lives. Therefore, we will begin with James 1.

Sermon: Follow Me: A Call To Discipleship!

Jesus's ministry had just begun and he was looking for people to work with him. He was not known by anyone, yet this did not faze him. When he met the people he called, all he said to them was "follow me." Through Jesus' invitation he started a chain reaction which was life-changing for the people who encountered him.

When he gives Philip the invitation to follow him, Philip goes and brings his brother Nathanael. Before meeting Philip, the previous verses tell us that Jesus had been passing by and John and two of his disciples saw him. John pointed out to his disciples that Jesus was the Lamb of God and they followed Jesus immediately. One of them was Andrew and the first thing he did was to go and get his brother Simon and told him that they had found the Messiah. And Jesus gave Simon the name Peter.

Follow me! We have gone through a very challenging year and by God's grace we made it to the next year. We thought this year would be better. When I took my vacation in August, I took two weeks since I couldn't travel anywhere; with the hopes that by December things would have improved greatly and I would be able to travel somewhere. However, when December came, we instead started getting the surges of a second wave of the pandemic. That is the prove of our level of uncertainty. Most of us have been in the same boat of hoping that by the end of the year or as we get into the New Year things will get better. Yet as the New Year was coming, we started hearing of new variants of the virus that was spreading even faster than the previous one.

Follow me! That is the invitation we are getting this year from our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is saying to you this morning and at the beginning of this year that – I know you are not sure of what will happen or how it will happen; I know you are not certain if the pandemic will end or not; I know you are confused and exhausted; but I am calling you to follow me.

An invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to become his disciples. Jesus did not just call the twelve but any who would believe in him to become his disciple. Who is a disciple and what is discipleship? A disciple is simply a follower of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus came, a disciple was a follower of a teacher. Discipleship existed even in the first century. For every devoted Jew, the Scriptures had authority over every aspect of their lives. Their desire was to honor God by obeying Him completely.

During this first century period, Rabbis had been given authority to interpret the Scriptures and to define the role of righteous living. If anyone admired a Rabbi's way of life, they would request to be discipled by him and if he accepted their request, they would totally submit to the Rabbi's authority in all areas of their lives as was interpreted by the Scriptures.

As Christians today, we don't need to be the disciple of any human. Jesus Christ has given us the invitation to follow him. We have been invited to become followers/disciples of Jesus Christ. The central goal of being a disciple is to willingly surrender to Jesus; it is to submit for a lifetime – every aspect of our lives including our marriage, children, our ministry, career, personalities, character, desires, values – we are to surrender everything to Jesus.

We might be wondering how we can become Jesus' disciples when he is not present like he was with Philip or Nathanael. We have to wrestle with the Scriptures. Daniel 11:32 says "the people who know their God shall be strong and do exploits." We have to constantly study the Word of God and pray constantly. When we spend time in God's presence, He reveals more of Himself to us and discipled us through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Follow me! That is an invitation. An invitation which begins with us and extends to others. We are just from celebrating Christmas and I reckon invitations are not strange to us because we have surely invited our family and friends for dinner. We

have invited people for different kinds of events in our lives. How many times have we invited people to Jesus or to church?

The invitation started with Jesus telling Philip follow me. Philip invited Nathanael, Andrew invited Simon, John the Baptist directed two of his disciples to Jesus. When you understand who Jesus is, you'll want others to know him. Who are we inviting to Jesus this year? Who are we inviting to church this year? Let us challenge ourselves this year to prayerfully invite others to God. Those we know used to come to church and are not coming anymore and those who have never come before.

For the past couple of weeks our sermons have been about God's light and His gifts to us. When we gave our lives to Christ, God filled us with spiritual gifts to serve Him and sometimes we are unaware of these gifts. The light in the sky opened the eyes of the wise men to the child who had been born and that light led them to the child because they were focused on following that light.

God's invitation to us for discipleship helps us to put a perspective on the gifts He has put in us and how we are to use these gifts. And yes, although we are all called to discipleship, our functions will be different. Samuel was called to a different purpose from the disciples in the New Testament.

For some of us, we might think like Nathanael that nothing good can come out of us or the church, but Jesus is saying "follow me." For others, like Samuel, we might not be sure where the voice is coming from, but Jesus is saying "follow me." For some of us, we have never really believed in Jesus Christ or that he died and was resurrected, yet Jesus is saying to us "follow me." For some of us, our purpose will be to go and call our sisters and brothers, our colleagues and neighbours and even people we do not know. Whatever the case maybe, it is time for us to respond to the call and invitation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is calling on you today, he is calling on you in 2021 – "follow me." Amen.

Prayer

Beloved God, You know us inside and out and you still call us to serve you. Lord, honestly, we are often hesitant, afraid, and wish to remain hidden. Empower us to listen for and to hear your call. Empower us to answer your call with "Here I am Lord." Empower us to follow you when you call us to follow you.

Lord of mercy and justice, so many have gone before us working to bring justice and peace to our country and our world. Their footsteps seem too big to step into to continue the work you have called us all to; so we hesitantly step one step at a time, bringing your seeds of hope, justice and peace into a world crying out for them. We remember before you today people living face to face with so much economic uncertainty, for those who have lost their jobs or worry what may happen as this year unfolds. God, speak to us a word of reassurance and embrace us with your love.

We pray for people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice, for those who are bullied at school, at work or at home, for those who are made ashamed of who they are: God, speak to them a word of dignity and embrace them with your love. For those living face to face with illness and suffering, for those struggling with disability, made more complex these days, and for those who know grief or anxiety, especially those cut off from comfort or support by months of pandemic isolation: God, speak to them a word of healing and embrace them with your love.

We pray for people divided by differences of race or creed, of culture, gender or generation: and we pray for all those who seek to build bridges of understanding and co-operation across differences. God, speak to them a word of reconciliation and embrace them with your love. We bring before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely. God, speak to us a word of wisdom and embrace us with your love. Lord of peace, we pray for your compassion and healing for those individuals in our congregation who need it. We pray for your comfort and presence for those who are grieving lonely and oppressed. We pray for warmth, shelter, clothing and food for those who are without.

Lord we say to you this day, "here we are your servants willing to preach your word, offer care where care is needed, presence where presence is needed, your love where your love is needed." Lord, strengthen us for our ministry today and every day. And so, joining our voices to Jesus' followers around the world, we pray the words he taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

And now, sisters and brothers, go from this place knowing that the God who made you also sustains you. The God who calls you also goes with you. The God who loved you before you were born still loves you today, and into all the tomorrows. Amen.