

Come and Follow Me

Message for Sunday, July 8, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

Children's Message:

What do you think this sign means?



Right! It means you can make a U-turn. Will you please explain for the younger ones what a “U-turn” means?

Right again! It means you can turn your car around and go the opposite direction. Let’s stand up and try doing that: we’re walking one way, and now make a U-turn, so we’re going the other way.

Jesus talked about making U-turns. Except he used a different word. He used the word “repent.” When a person repents, they stop the wrong things they’ve been doing, and start living in God’s way.

Luke 15:7, New International Version:

[Jesus said,] “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

The thing is, though, that I need to keep on repenting. I still do things that I shouldn’t. So I ask God to forgive me, and I aim to follow God’s way instead.

Message: “Come and follow me”

1) Jesus offers life: not just existence, not just getting by, but LIFE!

The year was 1915. Twenty-eight men were huddled together on an ice floe. They had set out over a year before to reach the South Pole. They knew now that they were never going to reach their goal.

For nine months their ship, the *Endurance*, had been trapped in the ice. Now the ice was shifting, the *Endurance* was slowing being crushed, and would soon sink out of sight. They went back to the ship to retrieve what supplies they could salvage. Then they laid their plans for survival.

They were 1,900 kilometres from the nearest outpost of civilization. Their leader, Ernest Shackleton, told them that their only hope lay in reaching Paulet Island and sailing from there. Paulet Island was 560 kilometres away—not across land, but across jagged sea ice which can move unexpectedly and crush a person like a peanut or drag someone into the freezing ocean—560 kilometres carrying their own supplies and dragging behind them three 20-foot boats.

Shackleton said to them, “You must leave behind everything that is not essential. You must give up every ounce of needless weight, for your very lives are at stake.”

Shackleton pulled a handful of gold sovereigns out of his pocket, and flung them into the snow. He took out a gold watch and chain and dropped them on the ice. Then the men gasped as he drew from his parka his single most prized possession in the world: the inscribed Bible which Queen Alexandra had given him at the beginning of the expedition. He lay the Bible on the pile of discarded treasures. “Your lives are at stake,” he repeated.

Soon afterward the men turned their backs on the camp and practically every personal possession and they set out across the ice.

It was much warmer that day when Jesus strode along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The drama was not so obvious but the stakes were just as high as Jesus approached Simon Peter and his brother Andrew while they were casting their nets in the

water. “Come follow me,” said Jesus. And they did. They left their nets and they followed him.

A little farther along Jesus came upon two more brothers, James and John, as they were sitting in their boat cleaning and mending their nets. “Come with me,” Jesus told them. And they came. They left their nets, left their hired hands and their father, left their boat, and went with Jesus.

Now it’s easy to understand why a group of marooned polar explorers would leave everything behind on the ice to follow Shackleton, because Shackleton offered them a chance at life, and life is more important than gold coins and beloved keepsakes. But why would four practical men, why would Simon and Andrew, James and John, turn their backs on their livelihood, their security, and follow Jesus?

They did it for the same reason the explorers did it. They left it all behind because Jesus offered them life. Real life. Something more than eating and breathing and sleeping. More than getting up, working, and going to bed. Real life, real honest-to-God life. The kind of life that matters more than nets and boats and running the family business. A kind of life so big and full that you can have it only if you are willing to give up everything else.

The Shackleton expedition made it back safely after some harrowing experiences. Every one of those 28 men made it back. But not every effort to explore the polar regions had turned out so well.

2) Jesus loves us; that’s why he calls us to great things

In 1845 Sir John Franklin led 128 men in an expedition to find the channel through the Northwest Passage. Not one survived. Why? Perhaps because they had the wrong priorities. They travelled on two sailing ships which had emergency steam engines. On a trip expected to take at least two years, they carried enough coal to last for 12 days. They had room for more coal but they used the space for other things.

Each ship had a 1200 volume library. Each ship had an organ. And each ship carried the proper tableware for elegant dining: china place settings, cut glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware

engraved with each officer’s own initials and family crest.

When the boats were lost in the ice, the sailors set out hiking for help. Over many years the frozen bodies have been recovered, a few at a time. The corpses were found loaded down with backgammon boards, tea, and a great deal of engraved sterling silverware. Even staring into the icy jaws of death, they could not bring themselves to leave their silverware behind.

Now let’s be honest here. You may not have to give up everything to follow Jesus. But you do have to be **willing** to give up everything to follow Jesus. The Lord knows what you really love. The Lord knows what’s in your heart. That’s why he gave a different invitation to this person:

Mark 10:17-22, New International Version:

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

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

Notice what I underlined: Jesus loved this man. His call to the man was for his own good. He called the man to change his heart from desiring what is merely valuable to what is absolutely priceless.

And that’s what this is about—a change of heart. Discipleship requires a new way of looking at the world, a new list of priorities, a new attitude which puts Jesus before everything else, before everyone else.

You know the disciples dropped their nets there on the beach and followed Jesus, but they didn’t really give up fishing, not forever. In the last chapter of

John's gospel we find them back on the boat again casting their nets. They didn't give up fishing any more than Paul gave up tent-making. But they did make up their minds that Jesus was more important than catching fish. And whenever the Master said, "Come!", they just left their nets and went.

They didn't give up their families, either. James and John didn't abandon their father Zebedee to starve. If the family business was healthy enough to employ hired hands, then clearly their father was going to make out all right without them.

And we know that Peter and the other apostles often took their wives along their missionary journeys [see 1 Corinthians 9:5]. They did not simply walk away from family responsibilities. But they knew that they must love Jesus even more than family.

If you are stumbling lost in the snowy wilderness, you have to decide which is more important: your gold coins or your life. You can't hang on to both. You have to make up your mind which comes first: sterling silver or survival. Try to keep both and you'll end up with neither.

You can't divide your loyalty. You can't love fishing with half your heart and Jesus with the other half. One must come first and the other must be expendable.

God calls us, not once but again and again throughout our lives, to choose new priorities, and leave behind the things that get in the way of following him. Sometimes God calls us when we are in a crisis. That's what happened with Jonah [see Jonah, chapter 4]. Sometimes God calls us in the midst of our everyday routines. That's what happened with those four disciples as they were going about their fishing business.

But every day, every single day we must decide how much we love our Lord. We must decide he comes first or second. We choose each day how much we will give up for his sake. Perhaps the things we surrender he will hand back to us, and perhaps not. But it doesn't really matter, because what Christ offers us is life. And that life is worth any cost, any cost at all.

Next Steps:

- Someone posed an interesting question: "Would you want to go to heaven if God wasn't there?" Ponder that one for a while.

The point the person was making is that what makes eternal life worthwhile is living in the presence of the loving God. When Jesus calls us, "Follow me," he is calling us to a life of service and sacrifice. But most important, he is calling us to a life with him, where we love and are loved in the most amazing way.

- What gets in the way of your relationship with Jesus? What distraction or temptation breaks your devotion? Which do you value more: Jesus, or that obstacle? Ask for help—from God and the people around you—for ways to work around that.