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Follow Follow Follow

In the 1960s, Tom Jones & Harvey Schmidt wrote the Off-Broadway Musical *The Fantastix*, that sang:

Try to remember the kind of September, when life was slow and oh so mellow...

Try to remember the kind of September when grass was green and grain so yellow...

Try to remember the kind of September when you were a tender and callow fellow...

Try to remember and if you remember then follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow

Any of the rest of us might have stopped with one “follow” and moved on to the next verse. Regularly when we encounter this text from Mark, we recite that Jesus called Fishermen to become Fishers of Men and Women. But this morning what I am struck by, is how many times throughout his ministry, Jesus invited others to follow, Andrew, Peter, James and John, Bartholomew and Matthew; but with this repetition we are also called to greater depths, invited deeper and deeper, follow, follow, follow, follow. For me, the issue of the CALL is not the date and time of the first Calling, but having accepted that Calling going deeper and deeper into faith and relationships and responsibility and conviction.

Everything that happens in the Gospel of Mark seems to happen “Immediately,” and every event “follows” from another. John comes from the Wilderness calling people to repentance and Baptism. Jesus follows John to the waters, where there is question of who is following whom, in a Baptism of Water or Baptism of Fire, following which the Heavens Opened, then Jesus followed the Spirit of God into the Wilderness to be Tempted for 40 days. AND today, Following John’s arrest and imprisonment, Jesus came preaching the same sermon of Repentance. That would take a special kind of faith and commitment.

There have been times when each of us have gone too far, crossed a line, said something we know offended. John the Baptist Called the World to Repent, he told the Pharisees they were “an incestuous nest of bloodsucking snakes,” then John attacked King Herod personally for a sin like that of King David: Herod killed his own brother, following which Herod married his brother’s wife. John the Baptist is not the Court Prophet Nathan, and Herod was no King David! John was a travelling nomadic prophet, son of a High Priest, who came from the wilderness, wearing a camel’s hair girdle and eating locusts and honey. Immediately Following John’s preaching against Herod, Herod had John arrested and thrown in the dungeon for two years, following which Herod had John executed. Jesus does not naively walk on the scene from Nazareth, according to the text Only FOLLOWING John’s arrest, does Jesus come out. Knowing John was arrested for what he said, would you continue preaching as John had done?

While this is how Jesus begins in the Gospel of John, would you say from what follows that Jesus preached Repentance? That is not what comes to mind. Forgiveness. Healing of the Sick. Hope. The love of God. But REPENTANCE requires we acknowledge the wrongs of the past and that we cannot continue that way. The word REPENT literally means to recognize being turned wrong and turn round to face opposite.

Realize that Aristotle, Plato, Socrates had come from this ancient world (Athens as opposed to Jerusalem), but culturally sharing in the Ancient world now occupied by the Roman Empire; as such there was great appreciation for Greek Philosophy. Typically, we experience life by knowing, feeling or doing, we know

by DEDUCTIVE REASONING, arguing from the compilation of facts to a conclusion; or INDUCTIVE REASONING the reverse of beginning with where we are, interpreting what factors contributed to this. But there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> variety of GREEK REASONING that derives from the IMPERATIVE, of responding to a CALL recognizing we cannot continue as in the past, we must immediately choose to follow in relationship differently than ever before.

THREE Curiosities about this... Jesus declares "REPENT and BELIEVE!" In English we routinely have Past Tense, Present and Future. The Gospel of Mark here uses the IMPERATIVE Case for REPENT AND BELIEVE, this is like Jesus crying "FIRE!" In ALL of Greek literature, someone using the IMPERATIVE CASE to declare REPENT & BELIEVE occurs only here, and in the same passage in the Gospel of John. Suggesting these were the actual words of Jesus, said with this intensity.

"BELIEVE" here is not about a set of Beliefs or a Religion. BELIEVE simply means TRUST, but with the same passion and imperative intensity as REPENT.

Many translations insert "BELIEVE ALSO IN ME" but that is not in the original text. Instead the words of Mark are "REPENT & BELIEVE IN THE GOOD NEWS." Is it different to TRUST IN THE GOOD NEWS, than it is to believe in a PERSON claiming to represent what people believe in?

Knowing where the Gospel goes, I wonder if continuing the ministry of John, continuing to preach "REPENT & BELIEVE" had been Jesus' intention, but FOLLOWING the arrest of John, Jesus heart continued in that direction, while Jesus revised his agenda? That Jesus recognized instead of people responding immediately by following differently, that the remainder of his life, teaching and ministry would be leading people to the point of REPENTANCE, of an Historic Event turning around their lives!

SO, what then becomes important is what we do FOLLOWING Jesus death and resurrection. Jesus healed a man of Leprosy... okay, how do I follow that, by curing illness how many lepers have you known? Jesus taught in Parables, how do we follow this by telling parables, or by seeing the world symbolically? Jesus who taught in parables and healed the sick, cared so much about us and about God, He gave us an 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment (to love one another), gave us the Communion Sacrament, suffered, died and rose anew... Now that is something I have an IMPERATIVE forcing me to consider: How do we follow the Crucifixion and RESURRECTION? Following Jesus' life, do we repent of what we have done, do we trust, do we begin living differently?

Robert Fulghum is an 83 year old American Author, probably best known for "Everything I Ever Really Needed to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten". In the Book "Uh-OH" he describes a College Student taking a year out, working as Night Clerk and Stable Groom at a Lodge in Montana in 1959. The work is lousy and monotonous, the pay is subsistence, every day for the first month, at noon the main meal of the day is a plate heaping with Wieners and Sauerkraut. To top it all off, the cost of this meal is deducted from their pay, whether they eat it or not. Finally, one night when the 75 year old Night Auditor was there, the young man comes across a note to the Chef for the next day, instructing the next day's meal is Wieners and kraut. The young man goes into a tie-raid of complaints, as the older man sits quietly on a stool. Finally, the older man says "You know what's wrong with you? It is not the Job, not the Chef, not the Boss, not the money, not the Country. What's wrong with you is you do not know the difference between an inconvenience and a problem. If you break your neck or if your house is on fire, You have a Problem. Everything else is inconvenience. Life is inconvenient. Life is Wieners and Sauerkraut, it stinks but it's food on the table. Learn to separate the inconveniences from the real problems, you will live longer, and annoy people like me less."

Everything considered, 2020 was inconvenient, that we who are here survived. There are FACEMASKS, a PROHIBITION AGAINST HUGGING, SOCIAL DISTANCING, the Vaccine to cure this is not as prevalent or as readily distributed as any of us like. But all of that is inconvenient for us. HOW are we going to Follow Up to what has taken place? How will we TRUST & BELIEVE the GOSPEL?