



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, October 14, 2018

Proper 23

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 | Psalm 90:12-17 | Hebrews 4:12-16 | Mark 10:17-31

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

With just a word, Andrew, always the dutiful one, embraced the recommendation of his teacher and left him to follow Jesus. He then brought his older brother, Simon, along with him. James and John were taken by Jesus' charisma, or were simply looking for something other than working in their dad's fishing business to fill their days. Matthew, when called, stood up from his tax collectors desk, and left the stress and probably an early heart attack behind. Philip, an acquaintance of Andrew and Simon was also quick to join the group. But his buddy, Nathanael, needed a little mystical persuasion before he would go with them. The other five? We are not told how they became Jesus' disciples, but they were there almost from the beginning. There were, of course, others who assisted Jesus in his ministry and travelled with him. From the gospels, we learn far more about Mary Magdalene than we do of Bartholomew. Martha and Mary, along with their brother Lazarus, seem to play a more active role in Jesus' work than either Thaddeus or Simon the Zealot. But the four Evangelists seem fixated on the idea of twelve disciples, if for no other reason than the literary harmony it creates with the twelve tribes of Israel.

But what if, what if Jesus had no intention of stopping with a mere twelve disciples? What if Jesus saw room, or the need, for more than just twelve? Today, we meet someone who may have been in line to become Number 13.

"A man ran up and knelt before Jesus, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Jesus and the man go on to have a somewhat typical student-teacher exchange centered on worthiness and religious requirements. It was a very touching and personal moment with Jesus, who as always, tried to satisfy a desire. Jesus concludes with the same words he used in calling each disciple, starting with Andrew: "come, follow me."

It's late in the game. Almost three years have passed since the Jesus mission began in Galilee. We've covered a lot of territory and are now near Jerusalem and the fateful events that await Jesus there. But the game isn't over. There is still plenty of work to be done and there is always room for one more disciple to assist in the mission. With every

potential follower Jesus meets, he acknowledges that what they have to offer is important to the work of the kingdom. In fact, without each contribution, the kingdom cannot be complete, so he says, "come, follow me." One thing Jesus never does, ever, is tell someone they are not needed. Anyone willing to follow is welcome. But this man can't bring himself to follow.

As much as this man longed to find purpose and fulfillment, he couldn't do what Jesus asked, and the position of Disciple Number 13 remained unfilled. He stands as the only individual we meet in the gospels who chooses not to accept Jesus' personal invitation to follow. If he in some way continued his search for the attainment of eternal life, the "what ifs" of this missed opportunity probably plagued him for a long time. The implications of this call raises an enormous "what if" question for us: 'what if I were personally asked to be Disciple Number 13?' Could I follow in the way Jesus asked the man he met on the road?

The fact of the matter is: we are all, in our own individual way, called to be Number 13. Jesus still has need and room for disciples. We each have the potential to follow him or decline. As individual and independent as we might like to think of ourselves, we are followers. If that's too passive a term to stomach we can think of ourselves in a more flattering light, as lovers. That's certainly a more appealing identity. Yet we will follow that which we love, what ever it is. The man who ran to Jesus in search of eternal life, was in the end more in love with his many possessions. He missed out on a unique opportunity and his life took another course.

Next week, we will be given our own opportunity to respond to a call. It will be a chance to determine the course of the life of this parish and our ministry in this community. Some very nice people are going to put one of these in your hands. It is a card on which you can indicate how much you intend to give in support of the mission of this church in the coming year. What you say, will shape our life at St. Andrew's. If you would like to give all that you have, the Parish Treasurer will stop you, but that's not what anyone is asking. What we are all trying to do here is to follow Jesus in the best way we can. And the reality is: that takes all of us making the contribution we can make

from the resources we have. The vestry, the clergy, finance committee and a few other parish leaders have already done that. Their pledges are the ones that have been reported in the bulletin over the past few weeks. We ask all of you to join us. I ask you to be thoughtful and prayerful before you fill out your pledge card next week. Ask yourself how your commitment to follow Christ will be reflected on this card. While the money we give is only one component of that commitment, it is a significant one, not just for the church, but for yourself.

What Jesus wanted for that rich man, and what he needed to do to inherit the eternal life he desired, was “to follow,” to be with Christ and to become like him, to love God and to allow himself to be loved. But the rich man didn’t hear any of that; he couldn’t follow Jesus, he was too busy holding onto something else that had come to possess him and left him stuck. Jesus isn’t asking anyone to prove their love for him by what we give away. He’s asking us to take the most precious gift he has to offer – himself, the life he has prepared for us. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asks us to follow. What if we took him up on his offer?