



Come and Follow: Faith that Moves

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 5-13; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23 || January 25, 2026 || St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA 02339 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

We are spending time during this beautiful and brief season of Epiphany considering how we find, experience and amplify the light of Christ in the world. Last week, we considered Jesus' beautiful invitation to "Come and See" and I offered that it might be a wise investment for each of us to spend a bit of time "going and looking". I'd love to hear whether your pursuits were fruitful? What did you see?

This week's gospel is wonderfully familiar, though Jesus is probably in a very different frame of mind. He is aware of John the Baptist's arrest by Herod and has withdrawn to Capernaum, a Roman occupied city. This morning we find he is walking along the very busy and bustling shores of the Sea of Galilee when he happens upon our friends and brothers Andrew and Simon Peter, who had starring roles in last week's gospel.

This week we get to visit the disciples at work, and it may be worth a pause to understand the work that they are engaged in so that we can imagine what it is that they so eagerly leave in order to answer Jesus' Call to follow.

Fishing was not a glamorous or well compensated profession in ancient times. It was demanding, year-round and often dangerous work requiring nighttime labor, continual threat of failure and very difficult manual work. Most fishermen were financially underwater and in debt for most of their lives, eking out a subsistence living, with the expectation that they would supply fish to the Roman Empire, pay exploitative taxes and would have to squirrel away fish or have an additional side-hustle in order to feed their families and make ends meet.

Most fishermen paid taxes to the King, rental fees for their nets and fishing equipment -- theirs was an incredibly challenging existence.

Why would anyone live like this, or pass this burden of insecurity and unpredictability or risk along to the generations that followed them? Andrew and Peter were fishermen, as was their father. Why not set them on a different path?

I wonder if it was because this was the only living or life experience they knew. If you are living hand to mouth, for whatever reason, it is nearly impossible to look up and dream or have aspirations that upend everything that is familiar to you.

This week I spent time working to offer a helpful hand to a neighbor who is probably the third generation of her family to live paycheck to paycheck. She is in a bind, and in no way is available for platitudes about the Kingdom of God or the light of Christ. She is focused on finding a way to pay her light bill.

You and I know that there is plenty of loving and generous assistance around – including at this parish, but she is sort of a pain to deal with, and is fantastic at burning bridges. I will say that I was deeply offended, on her behalf, by a comment made in the social service world, from the other end of a burnt bridge. My colleague offered that this neighbor is unpleasant to deal with and cannot be helped.

I'm praying about how to understand and act on this. For now, all I could think was, as seen in today's Gospel, Jesus didn't say to Andrew and Peter – hey, go and clean up your act **first** and then follow me. He didn't require these brothers to do anything proving their worth or even that they'd be good company before he invited him on their world-changing trek. He met them where they were, and upended their life. Or Andrew and Peter upended and changed everything about their own lives in order to follow Jesus.

What a beautiful reminder of this grace filled, unearned and litmus-free offer of love and God's presence that echoed and ricocheted through my week, it also made me curious about the eagerness with which brothers Andrew and Peter gave up EVERYTHING, put down EVERYTHING, threw over generations of lived experience and set out with Jesus.

Finally, with Andrew and Peter following Jesus, James and John did the exact same thing, and our scripture amplifies their choice and makes it all the more astonishing by telling us they literally left their Dad, Zebedee behind in a boat. Making me wonder whether it is easier to follow God or trust and take advantage of a generous invitation when people who look like you or know or shared your lived experience are extending the invitation?

What would it take for our bridge-burning neighbor to get on firm footing, divorce herself from generations of lived experience of being financially, socially and culturally insecure or marginalized? What would an effective invitation or opportunity look like for her life and the life of her children and grandchildren to be on a different path?

Andrew, Peter, John and James left the backbreaking work of living catch to catch to live difficult but fulfilling lives with Jesus. As we'll read, pray and revisit in the weeks ahead, their ministry was terribly difficult, so they didn't lay down their nets for luxury and comfort. But they did experience the daily assurance of being on the right path and living into the promises made by their friend Jesus. They spread love and light in a world that was divided and fractured along so many fault lines.

These first-called pioneers changed the world, and invited us to hear and consider how we answer Christ's invitation to follow. To lay down our burdens and faithfully fulfill God's call to us.

I can't say what that means for each of you, but I am certain that for me, my answer includes being mindful of representation and the impact it makes on peoples' availability to be loved, seen and heard. It also means that I'll spend some time looking at my own assumptions and praying for those places in which I may be stuck and not fully following Jesus. Finally, for my own faithful acceptance of laying burdens down and following I'm going to continue to reach out and be in motion in the world because **following** is such a dynamic concept.

If I'm sitting in this sanctuary and praying in the middle of the week, I am definitely being faithful, and I highly recommend it – this is a deeply spiritual and inspiring space! However, I think that part of this morning's invitation is to get out in the world and shine the light of Christ through

our lives by the way we live and engage with the neighbors and strangers or neighbors and neighbors we do not yet know in the world.

What does Jesus' invitation mean to you? Is there some part of your life that could do with a bit of reordering? Are there ways in which we might improve our posture and presence in the world so that it was more obvious who the boss of us is? This is the season to make these assessments and adjustments! This is the perfect time to review where we invest our attention and consider ways to upend it or reorder it so that we are not missing the opportunities extended by the One who loves us.

As Epiphany continues, may we each find ways to shed those things that weigh us down and prevent us from living into our call to follow Jesus.
Amen+