

3rd Sunday after The Epiphany
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on January 25, 2026

Isaiah 9:1-4 / 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 / Psalm 27:1, 5-13 / Matthew 4:12-23

*Speak in our hearts, O Lord, and say, "Seek my face."
When we hear Your Word, O Lord, Your face will we seek.*

Who here chose a career path because they were influenced by someone else? Your parents were doctors, so you pursued medicine. Or you admired a politician, so you studied political science. It doesn't have to be a career path that actually came to fruition. But did anyone here follow someone's lead on a career path?

<RESPONSES>

Who was it, and what was the career path?

Who here has ever followed a particular artist or musician? If they have a show, you always bought tickets, or if they produced an album? Or an athlete? Have you switched team allegiances when someone got traded? Or bought tickets to a game far, far away because of the player?

<RESPONSES>

Just curious, who are some of the people you follow on social media? For example, I follow the PBS host of *BBQ University*, a couple of actors from the British soap opera I watched for 20yrs, and *The Daily Show*. I follow 2 comedians on Instagram, and 1 of them was the reason for my first trip to Buffalo to see her and Niagara Falls last year. And I'm taking my first trip to Portland to see the other comedian.

You follow someone because they have some sort of positive impact on your life, right? You admire some qualities about them. Perhaps you want to emulate some

of those qualities or gain some insight or knowledge from them. These people are admirable and have some degree of influence over our lives. That's all great. But, is the call to follow Jesus different?

This morning, we heard Matthew's version of the Call of Andrew and Peter. Last week we heard John's version. Back-to-back, we get to hear the same story from 2 different perspectives. This is rare in the Lectionary. It usually doesn't repeat stories in different Gospels – a story that is in more than one Gospel is chosen for a particular Sunday and is not repeated. The exceptions are the Sundays after Christmas and Easter. And if a story is repeated, it is in a different Lectionary year, not on back-to-back Sundays. So, this is a rare moment for us. So, the Lectionary is practically begging us to do a comparison!

What I want to explore for just a moment is the difference in the actual call. Last week, Jesus says to Andrew and his companion, "*Come and see.*" This week, Jesus says to Andrew and Simon Peter, "*Follow me.*" What is the difference?

Jesus said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.

But what did they see? Last week's text only states that they saw where Jesus was staying. That's it. What was it that was so compelling that Andrew and his companion remained with Jesus for the rest of the day? And then, what was it that they saw or maybe heard from Jesus or maybe experienced while with Jesus that caused Andrew to go to his brother Simon the next day and proclaim, "*We have found the Messiah*"? And he took his brother Simon to meet Jesus.

The invitation to "*come and see*" is certainly compelling in and of itself. It's the polite term for the current buzzword FAFO, which is the acronym for the buzz phrase "*F* around and find out!*" The phrase – either one of them – make you kind of curious, so you are willing to "*come and see*" for *at least* the reason of FOMO: *fear of missing out*. This is why we follow people on social media. We

follow them to “*come and see*” what they are going to get up to that might entertain us, or inform us, or inspire us.

Today, Jesus says – to Andrew and Simon together, in this version: *Follow me*. That – to me – is less compelling. It begs the question: *Why?* With “*Come and see*”, I’m slightly interested and intrigued. With “*Follow me*”, I’m slightly suspicious and cautious. But Jesus gives them more than just a command; He offers a bit of the detail:

Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.

That might be a *bit* more compelling for these 2 fishermen. Here’s an opportunity for a lateral career move for which I might already have the skills. Maybe the time is right for such a change. Unlike “*Come and see*”, today’s command gives some context, and while there are definitely still unrevealed aspects to what the immediate future holds, there is enough that it’s not an impulsive FAFO or a means to satisfy their FOMO.

This is why we chose our career based on someone else’s career achievements, this is why we follow athletes even when there is scandal in their personal lives. They have done something we admire, and we want to be associated with them in some way.

But it’s different with Jesus. It has to be, or else our following of Him reduces Him to a celebrity. He is more than a celebrity. In last week’s Gospel, Andrew says to his brother: “*We have found the Messiah*”. That is why we follow Jesus. We don’t actually know if Andrew and Peter gave *any* thought to their decision to follow Jesus. Though, many preachers and reflection writers attempt to fill in the narrative in ways that make their sudden and seismic life change feel good to us, the reader. The only bit we know is that they left their careers and they left their father to follow Jesus whose only promise was to make them fishers of people.

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer is very blunt about the call of Andrew and Simon:

The call of Jesus goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus.

To me, that's last part is a striking statement. I actually get the first part, that they followed by a mere act of obedience to the Messiah. But that second part flies in the face of everything that comes after Jesus. Everything in the New Testament and in Christian teachings from then to now is all about faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and our call to follow Jesus is to have faith in Him. And several have pointed out over the last couple of decades that Jesus didn't actually call anyone to worship Him, yet that's what we do ... our *doctrine* states that we worship *God through Jesus Christ*, but our shorthand is that we worship Jesus Christ. But Jesus simply asked or commanded: *Follow me*.

It's the season of Epiphany, which started with the visit of the Magi. The Magi didn't follow Jesus because of His teachings. They followed Him for 1 reason and 1 reason only: because He was the Messiah. Then they went home!

Bonhoeffer continues:

[Scripture] displays not the slightest interest in the psychological reasons for a person's religious decisions. And why? For the simple reason that the cause behind the immediate following of call by response is Jesus Christ himself. It is Jesus who calls, and because it is Jesus, they follow at once.

Jesus summons us to follow him not as a teacher or a pattern of the good life, but as the Christ, the Son of God ... Follow me, run along behind me! That is all. To follow in his steps is something which is

void of all content. It gives us no intelligible program for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after.

I get it. I do. And I agree with Bonhoeffer. But ...

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

To follow Jesus – unconditionally or not – means that you’re in for the drama. You’re in to come and see, watch and learn, and then Jesus is going to tell you – command you to go and do likewise. The Commissioning of the 12, the Commissioning of the 70, the Commissioning of every person for the last 2,000 years who has chosen to follow Jesus.

To follow might be difficult, painful. It was for the Disciples. It meant certain death up until the Edict of Milan in 313. It was for Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was sent to the Nazi gas chamber for standing up for his faith. But we all take chances in our lives. Is it better to attempt and fail? Or to never take any chances? Do you want to be a part of something bigger than yourself that does good in the world and points people toward Heaven? To follow Jesus is hard. To be a Christian is even harder.

The fishermen leave their profession with no knowledge of what they will be doing and presumably no skills. Sure, they’re fishermen who are told that they will be made to fish for people. But did they really know what that meant? Maybe not. The social media post for Prayers & Pastries on Mondays sometimes includes: *No previous experience required.* And sometimes that works in your favor. Sometimes too much knowledge or the quest solely for knowledge gets in the way. Does the Epiphany in the following – the manifestation of Jesus in the following – come from more knowledge or from more experiences?

I follow those comedians on social media because they make me laugh, they make me feel good. I don't need to *know* more, but I enjoy the *experience* that comes with following them. And I do learn more about them through those experiences without seeking the knowledge as the objective. The same is with Jesus. Sometimes you just need some FAFO and some FOMO so you can *experience* Jesus and discover how following Him helps you know Him more deeply and how it changes your life.

You already are following Jesus Christ, or you wouldn't be here today. What are you *experiencing* as you follow Him? Maybe that could be your goal for this year: listen for the call to follow Jesus more closely, more confidently ... come and see where He leads you as you follow, and *experience* Jesus in new and enriching ways.

I will leave you to ponder the words of Bonhoeffer and the words of today's Collect:

Christ calls; we are to follow.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of His salvation.