

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

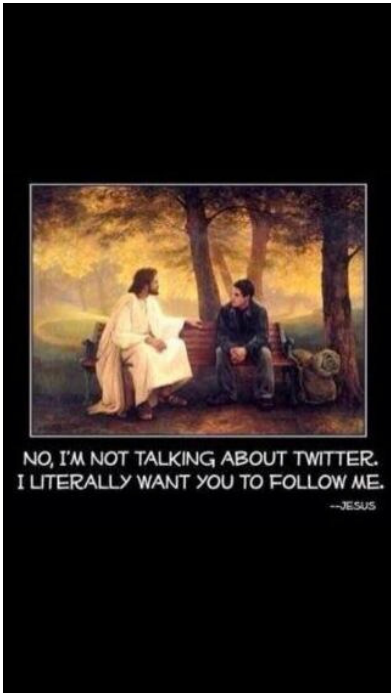
While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

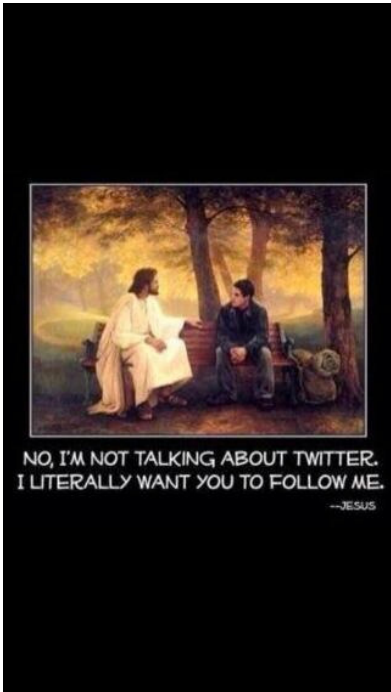
While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as The Thinker, The Kiss, and The Gates of Hell. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

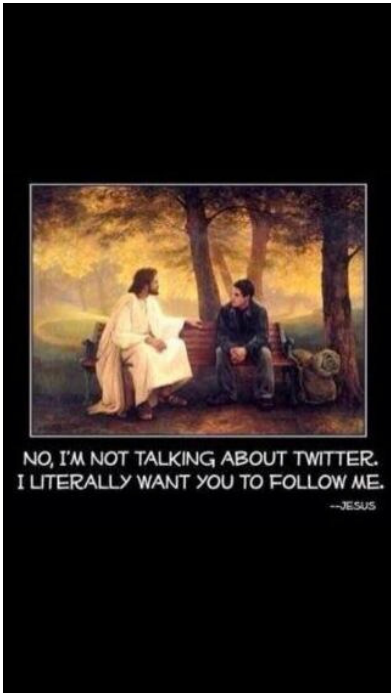
While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as The Thinker, The Kiss, and The Gates of Hell. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

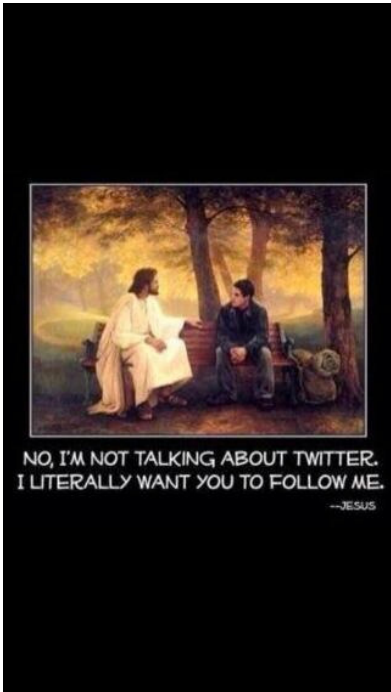
While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

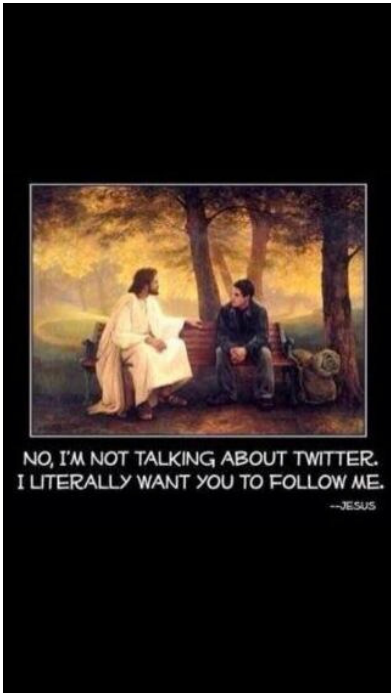
While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.

Isaiah 53:1-6

Mark 8:27-38

September 12, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

FOLLOWING JESUS

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I sent my first text in September 2008. That was after the Dean of Students told us parents during Jackson's college orientation, "You can forget calling your children. They won't answer. Send a text instead." Sometimes I would text Jackson, "Call me," and he would. It was a big day when I traded in my flip-phone for one with a slide-out keyboard and I didn't have to punch each key three or four times to get the right letter. Since then, I have learned to use FaceBook to send messages, Venmo to request payments, Kakao Talk to communicate with Natalie in South Korea, and Zoom to lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School, and attend lots and lots of virtual meetings.

On the other hand, I haven't learned nor do I use other social media platforms such as SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn. And I have yet to send the first "tweet" on Twitter. But I know plenty of people tweet and follow tweeters on Twitter. According to an article published on August 24, the most followed accounts on Twitter, from #20 - #1 and ranging from 54.6 million followers to 129.9 million followers, are: Demi Lovato; Bill Gates; Britney Spears [by the way, did you know her name is an anagram for Presbyterian?]; Elon Musk; Twitter; CNN Breaking News; Justin Timberlake; Selena Gomez; Kim Kardashian West; Narendra Modi; YouTube; Ellen DeGeneres; Lady Gaga; Ariana Grande; Taylor Swift; Cristiano Ronaldo; Rihanna; Katy Perry; Justin Bieber; and Barack Obama.

Shortly after Twitter was founded and its use exploded, the CEO and President of Social Media Today wrote, "Two of the most common questions asked when someone begins using Twitter are, 'Who should I follow?' and 'What should I look for when doing so?'" He then listed seven factors to consider before you follow someone on Twitter, such as the content of the tweeter's tweets, the person's background and profile, and how many other followers the person already has.¹ Interestingly, you can't ask someone to follow you on Twitter. Another tech article explains, "Asking someone to follow you can be challenging because Twitter doesn't allow you to solicit users to follow you. Instead, you must attract a person's attention in other ways, such as by posting interesting tweets and becoming a dedicated follower."¹

A few years ago I saw a cartoon captioned "If Jesus Had Used Twitter." It showed Jesus holding a smart phone with the message "You have 12 followers!" You would certainly hope Jesus told the crowd and his disciples that day on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, one has to wonder exactly how many "followers" Jesus has today. This week I came across another cartoon. It's funny but poignant and to the point.

Bill has put it on the screen. Fortunately, Jesus didn't and doesn't have to operate under Twitter's restrictions prohibiting asking someone to follow him. Nevertheless, Jesus' call to "Follow me" is more than just an invitation to be distracted from daily life or to share our personal opinions in 280 characters. "Follow me" is an invitation to an entirely new way of looking at and living in the world. And that life orientation can be quite a challenge.

While many Bible translations have Jesus say, "Follow me," in more than one story Jesus quite literally says, "Come after me" or "Come behind me." For example, we're used to hearing Jesus call his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, the brothers Simon and Andrew, with the words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17) Quite literally, Jesus says to Simon (who is also known as Peter) and Andrew, "**Come after me**, and I will make you to become fishers of people." When

Jesus called two other fishermen brothers, James and John, we are told "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." (Mark 1:20) Again, quite literally, "**they went after him.**"

What's interesting is that Jesus said the same thing to Peter after Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus looked at the other disciples and then said to Peter, "Get behind me!" In a very real sense, Jesus told Peter to put himself in the right place as his disciple. After all, the very definition of a disciple is "a **follower** or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher." Jesus didn't tell Peter to get away from him and never come back (although that is one possible translation). Instead, Jesus put Peter in his proper place. And, in the very next scene in the story, Jesus explains what it means to follow him and he uses the exact same language: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) Again, quite literally and more explicitly, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes **to follow after me . . .**" After all, that's what a disciple of Jesus does. And if you follow Jesus, that means going where Jesus takes you, rather than where you might rather go.

Harriet Tubman, famous for her work with the Underground Railroad and her abolitionist stance against slavery, escaped slavery herself. And yet, she ventured back into the slave-holding states numerous times, despite having a huge price on her head for her capture. She was a Christian and acted on her faith. When she was asked about the source of her apparent fearlessness and strength, she said, "It wasn't me, it was the Lord. I always told him, 'I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me.' And he always did."²

Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John didn't hesitate to follow Jesus when he called them. But sometimes others did. Think about these would-be followers of Jesus:



Someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go,” and Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

Jesus said to another, “Follow me,” but he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Another person said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home” and Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62)

Then there was the man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When he assured Jesus he had observed all the commandments since his youth, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.” That’s when we find out that “when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Those stories, and others, give us a clue to what Jesus means when he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35) Jesus didn’t tell the rich man he would be nailed to a cross if he didn’t sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor. But he certainly indicated the man would miss out on inheriting eternal life, because his life orientation was determined by his many possessions, rather than by following Jesus.

Recently I was reminded of the saying, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.” Adapting that thought, we get a pretty good definition of what it means to follow Jesus — “Being a disciple is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less and thinking of Jesus more.” At the conclusion of his Christian classic, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “The principle runs through all life, from top to bottom. Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death — the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that had not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in.”³

Of course, as it was for Peter, so it is with us. The idea of picking up your cross and following Jesus isn’t always that enticing. I wonder how many followers Jesus could get on Twitter today if that was his message! Even though we often lament life’s troubles and hassles with a sigh, “I guess that’s just my cross to bear,” that’s not really what Jesus meant. If you’re a human being, you’re going to have troubles and hassles. But Jesus means going where he takes you, and that’s hard to do, isn’t it? Another great spiritual writer of the 20th century, Henri Nouwen, wrote, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I’m a part.”⁴ And yet, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Peter got rebuked for rebuking and trying to get out ahead of Jesus. But you know what? In Mark's very next story, Peter gets to go up on the mountain and see Jesus get transfigured in his glory. Throughout the gospels, Peter doesn't always get it right when it comes to following Jesus, even to the point of denying knowing the man when Jesus was on trial for his life. Nevertheless, at the very end of John's gospel, when Peter is sad because Jesus has asked him three times, "Do you love me?" we read, "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:19)

The story is told about the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, known for works such as The Thinker, The Kiss, and The Gates of Hell. It is said that one day he found a very large and carefully carved crucifix by the side of the road. He was so taken by it, he bought it and made arrangements to take it to his house. Unfortunately, the cross was too large to fit in his house. As the story goes, Rodin knocked down the walls of his house, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.⁵

That's a powerful image for Jesus' words, "Follow me." Remember those two important questions to ask about Twitter? Who should I follow?' and What should I look for when doing so? When we follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, we will look to build our lives around the cross and let it shape everything we do as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after you, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that you are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jeremy Victor, "7 Factors To Consider Before You Follow Someone On Twitter," June 9, 2010 at www.socialmediatoday.com.

²C.D. Crowder, "How To Request Someone to Follow You on Twitter," at www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com.

³From a sermon by Harvard Stephens, "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way," September 17, 2000 at www.day1.org.

⁴From a sermon by Peter W. Marty, "Christ and Everything Else Thrown In," September 17, 2006 at www.day1.org.

⁵From a sermon by Robert T. Baggott, "Cross Purposes," March 1, 2015 at www.day1.org.