



**Pastor Robyn Hogue**

## SERMON

# Fan or Follower?

**Matthew 4:18-22**

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**Skyline Presbyterian Church**

Pastor Kyle Idleman has written a very thoughtful book titled “Not a Fan.” He begins by noting that the percentage of U.S. citizens who claim to be Christian is somewhere north of 75 percent. “Really?” we ask, “Three out of four people in our country are followers of Christ?” Let’s see, if the population of the United States is as reported on Friday, January 20, 2017 to be 325,423,956 and 75 per cent are Christians, that brings the number of Christians to somewhere in the neighborhood of 244 million. That’s a lot of Christians.

But if there really are that many Christians, then why will some 42 million people in the U.S. go to bed hungry tonight, including 13 million children? If 75 percent of U.S. citizens are Christians, then why are there more than 108,000 children waiting to be adopted? The numbers don’t add up. Jesus said the evidence that someone is one of His followers is love. “So, just over 244 million?” we say, “The evidence just isn’t there.”

What’s the explanation for such a discrepancy? This is where Idleman is helpful. He tells about an article he read a number of years ago about a group the article called, the “new vegetarians.” These new vegetarians don’t eat meat--most of the time. One of them explained that she was a vegetarian, but she really liked bacon. And so she ate it. A vegetarian, by definition, is someone who doesn’t eat meat. But isn’t bacon a meat? Is it really accurate for her to identify herself as a vegetarian? Then he adds that the discrepancy was solved by coming up with a new term to describe vegetarians who aren’t committed to abstaining from meat. They now identify themselves as “Flexitarians.”

“A Christian,” continues Idleman, “by definition, is a follower of Christ. So, I’m thinking that what might help make sense of the 244 million number is a new word to describe people who identify themselves as Christians but have little interest in actually following the teachings of Jesus. Perhaps instead of ‘followers,’ it would be more accurate to call them ‘fans.’”

The word fan is most simply defined as, an enthusiastic admirer. I think Jesus has a lot of fans these days. They like being associated with Jesus. Fans want to be close enough to Jesus to get the benefits, but not so close that it requires more from them. They want a no-strings-attached relationship. So a fan says, “I like Jesus but don’t ask me to forgive the person who hurt me. I like Jesus, but don’t talk to me about personal stuff like money or sex or politics. That’s off limits.”

Fans like Jesus just fine, but they don’t want to give up the bacon.

Today’s reading from Matthew is about four men who were called by Jesus to be His disciples. They were not called to be fans of Jesus, but followers. Their names were Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, four fishermen. Yet this reading is also about us, because we have been called to be disciples as well. We also have been called to be followers and not fans. I’ll let you decided to which group you belong. But first let’s ask, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Jesus began His public ministry by preaching, “Turn around for the kingdom of heaven has come

near”. He immediately began to gather around Him a group of disciples, companions on the journey of faith who later would form the church. Jesus will not be alone in proclaiming and embodying the reality that the kingdom of heaven is near. Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told two sets of brothers, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John: “Come, follow Me.”

The amazing thing is that they immediately left their nets, their boat, their fathers, and followed Jesus. The Scriptures doesn’t give us any indication about their thought process or their emotional state at hearing the call of the Lord. The Scriptures just say they obeyed Jesus’ call. Discipleship is just that: hearing God’s call and obeying it—even if it means radical changes of direction in life.

A danger for us is the tendency to define our direction and then invite Jesus to tag along with us. Christian discipleship does not begin with our seeking out Jesus and calling Him to participate in what we are doing. Discipleship has to do with Jesus’ call to us and our response. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “Discipleship is not an offer [humans] make to Christ. It is only His call which creates the situation.”

One of the songs that often ran around in my head in my teen years was “Put Your Hand in the Hand”. The chorus goes like this:

Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water  
Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea  
Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently  
Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee

The image is that, when Jesus says we should leave everything behind, we put our hand in His and go where He goes. I am not sure why this one struck me so much, because if we live by it, we will end up in places we never imagined being, doing things we never imagined ourselves doing, and sharing life, friendship, service and worship with people with whom we would have never imagined ourselves interacting.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John all “put their hand in Jesus’ hand” and followed—and they had no idea where Jesus was going to lead them. Despite not having a road map for the journey that lay ahead of them, they obeyed the call of Jesus and followed. A crucial part of discipleship is trusting in the One who has called us and can faithfully lead us from what is known and comfortable into what is unknown and perhaps uncomfortable. It is in following Jesus, we come to know the fullness of God’s mission and purpose for our lives.

In my ministries I have often followed a model of “know, grow, go”—teaching the doctrines of the church, trusting in Christian growth through knowing truths, and then embracing folks into the fellowship of the church and its ministries by sending them out. Here in Matthew we see that in Jesus’ plan, our plan is reversed: go, grow, know.

The fact that these first four disciples left behind nets, boats, and fathers is a sign that followership is not cheap. God’s call on our lives is not convenient. For followers, Jesus’ claim upon our life is more important than our careers, our material possessions, our associations, and even our families. If anything gets in the way of our call to follow Jesus, we are to leave it behind. Our careers—read vocations, material possessions and families—are to function in the service of God’s mission. If they are in any way embodying the powers of the kingdoms of this world that promote oppression, greed, or brokenness, we are called to repent and reorient them so that they reflect and embody salvation,

justice, and wholeness—the realities of the kingdom of heaven that are breaking forth in our lives and in our world.

The calling of the disciples is the beginning of the formation of the church—the community of men, women and children “called out” to be agents of God’s mission in the world. The church is not an end in itself, but rather a means through which God works to fulfill divine purposes. The church is not the destination of discipleship, but rather the vehicle through which a community of disciples is joined together to fulfill God’s purposes in the world.

When Mark Adams was a summer camp counselor, he led a lesson on the church. To begin, he asked the children to draw a picture of the church. His assumption was that the children would draw a picture of the church building. One eight-year-old girl did not “go along with the program” and stole his lesson.

She had five pictures drawn on her paper. In the upper left corner, she drew a picture of a woman in a bed with people surrounding her. She explained that that was her grandma in a hospital bed and the people around her were the pastor and the people from the church praying for her grandma’s healing. In the upper right corner, she drew a picture of a can. She said that there were hungry people in the world and God does not want people to be hungry so the church shares its food. In the bottom right corner, she drew a picture of a group of children playing because in the church you can make really neat friends. In the bottom left corner, she drew music notes with people of different sizes and of different colors. She said that God loves all people, and the church gathers to sing thank-you to God. In the middle of the paper, big enough to invade the space of each picture’s space and to unite them, she drew a big heart—God is love, and we are called to love God and to love our neighbors.

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus called four men—Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John—to leave what they were doing and follow Him. He called them not to be fans, but to be followers. These were four ordinary souls and God did extraordinary things through them. The first part of their pilgrimage was spent in the fellowship of Christ and other believers in order that they might grow to spiritual maturity as Christ’s followers. But there came a time when in order to continue their growth they discovered that they must go into the world and become servants both of the Word and the world. That is our calling as well, to move beyond being a fan to being a follower of Jesus Christ.