

Text: Mark: Follow me and I will make you fish for people.

## **FOLLOWING JESUS: THE MODERN PATH**

. . . from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they, were not rejoicing and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

That is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. If that had been his first letter to the Texans, there would not have been a second, for we love our families, mourn our dead, inundate ourselves with possessions and consider the art of the deal to be a basic Texas trait. As for "fishing for people" we would define that to be human trafficking and put a stop to it.

Obviously, in today's culture we are so enmeshed in our activities and so bound to our responsibilities that to simply get up and leave physically to follow Jesus is impossible for most of us. Following Jesus takes on a more complex meaning in today's inter-connected world. Followership takes place in three settings. Let us look at them.

First of all, following Jesus is a personal choice. Although most of us are born into the Christian faith, we choose to become Jesus followers. It is a choice easily made and easily broken. Easily made because confirmation is part of our growing-up. It is, for the young, a step into adulthood. For those of us confirmed as adults it is an acknowledgement that we have reached a new point in life's spiritual journey. It is a choice easily broken because we sometimes don't like where Jesus is leading us. No, Jesus. I don't want to follow you to serve others and selflessness. I have a date with selfishness and ego building

calling me. Short term pleasures are frequently a more enticing calling than are long term values. If following Jesus is a long straight road, I have frequently followed all kinds of meanders, short cuts and dead ends. Being reflectors of God's love is sometimes hard work, but that is what it means to be a follower of Jesus at the personal level.

Personal commitment to Jesus is not enough to be counted among His followers. We have our living space to consider. The space over which we have the most impact is our community. Whether we are big fish in small ponds or minnows in a big city, we have a Jesus agenda to carry out. The particulars of the agenda varies with time, place and people, but the guiding light, if it is to be called Jesus following, is love. Are our communities displaying love to all who dwell therein? Probably not. The needy, the different and the difficult are either cloaked in invisibility or are avoided. If there is any interaction with such people it is limited to some kind of institutional response. God love them! And it is a good thing that God does, because I don't want to. But, if I really am a Jesus follower, I must follow Him right up to the people that I disagree with and wish to ignore. A community is not parks, buildings, streets and officials. It is a dynamic network of human behavior and our task is to suffuse that network of behavior with love. Hey, no one said that being a Jesus follower was going to be easy!

Our third aspect of followership is the institutional church. Many people I come into contact with tell me that while they believe in God, they don't go to church, don't like the institutional church and feel that they can find God in nature and elsewhere. They are especially eager to tell me that the church is full of hypocrites. Well, where else should a hypocrite be? That is a lot like saying, I may be ill, but I won't go to a hospital because of all of the sick people there. Church is where personal commitment, community service and world outreach come together.

The church, as an institution, multiplies my faith and my resources. How else am I to help in the education and healing of many people who are beyond the reach of formal government programs? The church goes where many other organizations may not.

The rituals of the church give us a link to the past and a feeling of continuity, but they also are forward linking, making us confident of the future. This confidence allows us to fearlessly face change that intimidates many people and corrupts their response to social problems.

To truly be brothers and sisters in Christ, we must make our commitment; make that commitment live in our communities and find a wholeness of spiritual living in the institutional church. We can do all of these things – with God's help. Amen.