

September 7, 2014
Luke 18:35-43
Hope Lutheran Church
Pastor Wayne Puls & Pastor Lew Upchurch

Conversation Between Two Pastors

PASTOR UPCHURCH

5,355,649 followers. Can you believe that? This guy from Brazil named Wellington Camp has over 5 million followers on *Instagram*. Do you know why people are following him? Because he posts funny pictures of Woody from the movie *Toy Story*.

Look at this one ... here's another one ... and one more.

As funny as these pictures are, over 5 million people are so interested in seeing photographs of a toy, they follow this guy on *Instagram*. I guess if you're really interested in something, it's easy to be a follower.

This may sound silly but I wonder if Jesus was on *Instagram*, or *Twitter*, or even that most ancient of social media *Facebook*, how many followers do you think he would have? Would people even care about what he has to say when compared with the posts of their favorite sports team or celebrity? For most of us, the truth is that none of these people have actually spoken to us. None of these people have called us to do anything yet we still follow them don't we?

But Jesus has actually spoken to us through his Word. He has called us to faith- we can't ignore that. Over and beyond everyone else, he has called us to follow him, to be his disciples. He is saying to us right now, "Follow me!" Shouldn't his calling be a significant part of our lives?

PASTOR PULS

Jesus said those same words to many different people back in the Bible days. It's fascinating to me how the Gospels are filled with stories of people who picked up everything to follow Jesus. Remember this story from Luke, chapter 18? This blind guy is healed by Jesus; and, instead of going to see his family or celebrating with his friends, what is the first thing this guy does? He immediately starts following Jesus.

Luke 18:35-43 (ESV)

As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." ³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." ⁴² And Jesus

said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." ⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

I imagine that man's life was never the same after he met Jesus. Everything was different – he was a changed man. His priorities were revolutionized. He thought that the most important thing for him to do, from that point on, was to follow Jesus.

It makes you stop and think doesn't it? Jesus didn't heal me from blindness; but, when Jesus came into my life, he brought me spiritual healing. He forgave my sins, he healed my soul, and he made me right with God forever. You could say that you and I are changed, just like the blind man, because Jesus is a part of our lives.

PASTOR UPCHURCH

So why is it so hard for Christians like us to do what the blind man did – to make following Jesus our number one priority? It's one thing to go to church, to say "I love Jesus, and I believe in Christ." It's a much more difficult thing to walk with him day by day, to actually imitate his love for others, to follow in his footsteps out there in the real world as his disciple. Following Jesus sounds simple; but it's a great challenge.

How do we communicate the message that as followers of Jesus Christ, God wants us to actually live out our Christian faith?

PASTOR PULS

It's really not a simple thing, is it? It's not as if we can just preach a sermon or two, or teach a quick Bible study, and then everybody will know how to be a faithful disciple. Everybody's faith journey is different. Everybody's problems are different. We all face our own unique challenges and choices. Maybe every Christian has to wrestle with this, and ask himself or herself: "What does it mean for me to be a Jesus follower? What can I do in my own life to start following Jesus more seriously, more intentionally?"

PASTOR UPCHURCH

I think you're right. As pastors, we can make some suggestions, and challenge our congregation to think about their discipleship in some specific ways. But it's on every Christian – whether they're young or old, long-time believers or brand-new Christians – to say, "Hey, this discipleship stuff matters to me! Jesus really does want me to follow him. I need to take a hard look at how I'm living out my faith. Maybe I can do better. Maybe God expects me to do better."

PASTOR PULS

And the great thing is, God promises to help us do better! He has so much to offer! I can't wait to see what God starts to do in the lives of our church members, when we start talking about this "following Jesus" topic with them.

CONVERSATION WITH CONGREGATION

PASTOR UPCHURCH

So let's start talking to them right now. You know, folks, God in his Word does speak to us about how we are to walk with Christ and to follow him in our daily living. Here are just a few short verses that speak to this point.

1 John 2:6 -- "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

"Walk in the same way he walked" The way that led to the cross. We Christians need not and cannot repeat Christ's unique saving death, but we should all do what we can to mirror his faith, his love, his obedience, and his self-sacrifice shouldn't we? That's how we show others that "we are in him."

Ephesians 5:1-2b -- "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."

PASTOR PULS

God is calling us as his beloved children to be imitators of his love in the way we live our lives. Christ will always love us because he gave himself up for us. What a gift! Our response to that gift is to follow him and live as his disciples.

1 Corinthians 7:17 -- "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him."

PASTOR UPCHURCH

God calls people to himself who are in a wide variety of "life situations," and God has a purpose for the believer in that very situation. That verse teaches us that God has specific plans for you – some work for you to do, some love to share, some way that you can follow in Christ's footsteps, no matter who you are or where you're at in your faith journey. Because everybody's experience of following Jesus is unique. And we all face our own unique discipleship challenges, don't we?

PASTOR PULS

Let me tell you all about a guy I last month at that church conference up in Virginia. His name is Dave. He was telling me about his story of following Jesus, and how he's been through some serious ups and downs. Dave grew up in a Lutheran church, went to Lutheran schools, and he knows a lot about the Bible and about the church. His life was going along great – college, job, marriage, kids – but then everything fell apart for Dave. He lost his job, his marriage broke up, he stopped going to church. He suddenly found himself feeling all alone, without a solid connection even to God. Dave told me how it took him a long time, but he eventually started getting to know Jesus all over again. He started reading his Bible, he really got to know some Christian friends. Dave started working on figuring out what it really means for him to be a follower of Jesus. He tried making some different

choices, and setting some new priorities; and he's feeling a strong, close connection to the Lord these days.

So when Jesus says, "Follow me" to a guy like Dave, it might have a very different meaning than when he says, "Follow me" to one of us. We all need to ask ourselves, "What is Jesus calling me to do? What can I do in my own life to start following Jesus more seriously, more intentionally?"

How about if we talk about this with some kids? Have you seen any children around here today, Pastor? Let's invite the kids to come on up front here with us for a few minutes.

Children's Message

PASTOR UPCHURCH

There's a lot we can learn about following Jesus from kids. Let me ask you grownups and older kids. How many of you agree with this statement? "It's not easy for me to know how to follow Jesus." Raise your hand.

PASTOR PULS

How many of you agree with this one? "Sometimes I wish I were doing a better job as a disciple and follower of Jesus?" Raise your hand.

PASTOR UPCHURCH

How about this one? "Jesus Christ probably wishes I were doing a better job of following him?" Raise your hand.

PASTOR PULS

Look, we're here today to tell you that we understand that discipleship isn't easy. We're going through the same challenges as you are. We're facing the same temptations as you. We're distracted and influenced by the ways of the world just like you. Jesus says, "Follow me," but there a million and one other things for all of us to do every day. We need the Lord's help, and we need to help each other with this, too.

So we're going to be preaching about discipleship and about following Jesus in the weeks ahead. We know we don't have all the answers, but we know there's a lot to talk about.

A couple of weeks ago we were at the Men's Summit here at Hope. Our theme was "Encouragement for Life's Challenges," and we asked the men to jot down anonymously one or two challenges that they're facing in their lives. Here are a few of their answers. These are some of the real life struggles and issues that make it hard for people like us, in this church, to follow Jesus, and to live the life of faith.

PASTOR UPCHURCH

Read 6 or more challenges from cards ...

For Christian men these days, for Christian women, for Christian teenagers and college students and young adults, even for kids, living the Christian life isn't easy. There are lots of challenges that make following Jesus a struggle.

PASTOR PULS

Let me ask you all another question. "Do you know somebody who really seems to have his/her discipleship act together?" Is there someone you know who you think is doing a good job of following Jesus? Raise your hand. Lots of us know people like that, and we look up to these discipleship superstars, don't we?

What about this one? "Do you know somebody who believes in Jesus, but is making a horrible, awful mess of their relationship with Jesus?" Do you know anyone like that, who seems to be wallowing in the discipleship pig pen? Raise your hand.

You know, when it comes to following Jesus, there are some superstars and there are some complete slackers. How do you rate yourself? Where do you fit in? No matter where you see yourself – whether it's way up here, or way down here – we are all invited today to walk with Jesus, starting right now. We are all called to live the life of a believer, every one of us. We all have room for growth, don't we? We can all do better.

PASTOR UPCHURCH

And God, by his Word – God, by his Spirit; God, by his forgiveness and his healing – wants to help us all to do better. "Follow me," Jesus says today to you, and to me, and to every single one of us. The Lord God wants to help us learn to follow Jesus and to connect with Christ's people, to learn Christ's words and to apply them, to embrace Christ's mission and to discover our own mission.

Look, folks, we think that this stuff really matters.

PASTOR PULS

We believe this is truly important, for all of us. We're taking Jesus' words, "Follow me," seriously – and we want you to take them seriously, too.

As we leave today, we all need to ask ourselves once again, "What is Jesus calling me to do? What can I do in my own life to start following Jesus more seriously, more intentionally?"

We challenge you today to take this discipleship journey with us this fall at Hope, and we're excited to see where the Lord leads us, as a congregation and as Christian disciples. "Follow me," the Savior calls. Jesus is calling you, too!