

Follow Me

Today we will baptize three children. Three children who have no idea what they are getting themselves into. No more than the first disciples did; Andrew and Peter, James and John, when they were called this day.

"Follow me," Jesus said; Jesus says, to you, to me. If you say "yes" the only thing for sure is that you're in for an adventure.

Some years ago, at Disney World, my friend suggested we take a ride on Space Mountain. I agreed, thinking this was going to be a nice, leisurely ride through various parts of our nation's space program.

However, when we got into our seats, the attendant told everyone to take off their glasses and toupees and false teeth, and anything else that may fall off of or out of our bodies. I realized, too late, that I was sorely mistaken about what kind of ride I was in for!

"Follow me," Jesus said, Jesus says. And if you say "yes," hold on to your socks!

Jesus could care less about my comfort zone and yours. Jesus could care less about what is easy to do. Jesus could care less about keeping things the way they are.

All of which is very good news, and very bad news, for you and for me, and for the world.

Good news because, in Jesus, the upside down world will be set right side up. Bad news because we have come to love this upside down world, and often fear what it will look like standing right side up.

In our upside down world we divide ourselves into race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, age, and on and on. It even infects our churches.

Martin Luther King Jr., whose life we celebrated last week, pointed out long ago that the most segregated institutions in our country are our churches!

Maybe you've heard about the old African-American man who had tried for years to become a member of a white church. The members of the church found one reason after another to keep him from joining. Exasperated, he asked God why this was happening. God replied, "Don't feel so bad, I've been trying to get in that church myself, and they won't let me in either!"

In God's *right side up world*, the world intended for us from the beginning, there is no division among people. In the Old Testament, it is said that the sons of Noah became the fathers of all of the races on earth. All of the races began within one immediate family.

Yet too often, we find our safety in the slow ride of division rather than in the thrill ride of unity between people.

We have even experienced that here at our beloved St. E's. A church founded by a white deaconess from Ohio, then brought to maturity through the nurture and love of Chinese immigrants and their offspring, now looking more and more like a United Nations of worshippers; with the newest immigrant group being the long-suffering people of Micronesia, displaced from their homes, displaced from their islands, displaced from their native culture, thanks to atom bomb testing in decades past.

Forming a community of those from vastly different places, from vastly different experiences, is part of the call of Jesus when he invites us all to follow him.

The ride will not be a slow and stately affair. It never is with Jesus. It will be wild, and sometimes scary...we may lose a toupee and some teeth along the way; but such is the call to follow Jesus!

This call, to move from what is familiar and comfortable; it is a call that has existed from the very dawn of creation. Nikos Kazantzakis puts it this way:

"Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath – a great Call – which we name God.

Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to stagnant waters, but the Call leaped up within it and violently shook its roots: 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried, 'I don't want to. What are you urging me to do! You are demanding the impossible!'

But the Call, without pity, kept shaking its roots and shouting, 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

It shouted in this way for thousands of eons; and lo! As a result of desire and struggle, life escaped the motionless tree and was liberated.

Animals appeared – worms – making themselves at home in the water and mud. '

We're just fine,' they said. We have peace and security; we're not budging!'

But the terrible Call hammered itself pitilessly into their loins.
'Leave the mud, stand up, give birth to your betters!'

'We don't want to! We can't!'

'You can't, but I can. Stand up!'

And lo, after thousands of eons, man emerged, trembling on his still unsolid legs.

The human being is half man, half horse: his hoofs planted in the ground, but his body, from breast to head is worked on and tormented by the merciless Call.

He has been fighting, again for thousands of eons, to draw himself, like a sword, out of his animal sheath. He is also fighting, this is his new struggle, to draw himself out of his human sheath.

Man calls in despair, 'Where can I go? I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss.'

And the Call answers, 'I am beyond. Stand up!'

The Call is God's Spirit within us -- calling us constantly out of ourselves and beyond ourselves in order to be ourselves.'" Robinson, In The End, God, 7-9.

These three children, about to be baptized, embark on the journey that comes with being a follower of Jesus. You and I, as people of the Way, are fellow travelers on that journey. We do not know where this road will take us. Nor did the first to be called.

Peter never foresaw his own crucifixion; but neither did he foresee that a magnificent church in Rome would bear his name. Andrew never imagined that entire countries would look to him as

their patron saint. Just so, neither you nor I can know what challenges God has in store for us, or what wonders.

Such is the life these children now enter. Such is the life to which we are all of us called.

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