

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. Immediately they dropped their sole source of income, their life's work, their identity, and followed a man who simply said to them "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And again, he called to two more, brothers, and they immediately left their boat, left their father, and followed him. They not only left their way of earning income, catching food for themselves as much as for those in their community, they leave a job in the middle of working it. They leave their father, standing in the boat, wondering how he is to finish mending the nets, how he is to haul in these nets full of fish when he is down two workers. They leave their father wondering why his own sons would abandon him. They leave stability to follow a man who has a simple message: follow me.

These first of the disciples give up everything to follow Christ. They give up their very lives to follow a stranger, because something about this man speaks to their soul. They give up their stability, their means of income, their means of eating, they give up their families, in order to follow a man, a healer, spreading a good news wherever he goes. And the question becomes, what do we give up to follow Christ?

It is hard in this place at this time to picture what we give up to follow Christ. This is due to the simple fact that being Christian in America, particularly white Christians in America, is a very protected identity. One does not have to give up their status in society, their job, their family, in order to be a Christian today. This is not to say that some do in fact have to do these things to be a certain type of Christian in today's society, but ultimately,

you are still in a comfortable place, experiencing a comfortable religious identity, that does not ask you to give up much in order to follow.

In my own experience of giving up, I still found myself surrounded by a support system that protected me from experiencing the utter break that the earliest disciples are depicted choosing today. Many of you already have heard this part of my story, but for those who haven't, I did not always plan on being a priest. In preparation to pursue law school, I worked for two years as a paralegal with the federal government. And I left that position, I left that full-time salary and benefits, to take an internship role with a small 9-month stipend and a room in a house, because I knew that ministry was where I was called, I chose to follow Him. But even in making this choice, in giving up all the success I had experienced in those two years, I was safe. I never went hungry. I never was left wanting for better. I made a mission trip to Kenya and toured Europe for nearly a month, I tried out skydiving, I made road trips to attend concerts. Even in giving up everything I had, I still was comfortable. It's true that in this decision, I was giving up friendships as I moved half-way across the country, but new ones formed that I never thought I'd have. It's true that I gave up financial security, but I gained happiness and joy and a path to seminary and again finding financial security in a new vocational call. So, even in my own experience of giving up to follow Christ, there was a safety net to allow this to happen, and that's because we live in a time where following Christ's call should not be hard.

And yet, we constantly ignore this call for the sake of our own comfort, for the sake of our own frustrations, for the sake of our own hurt and pain, forgetting that it is only

through Christ that we can experience redemption, that we can experience reconciliation and salvation.

Active voices in the Church world (predominately liberal voices, both Episcopalian and not) have been vocally decrying the involvement of the National Cathedral in hosting the Post-Inaugural Prayer Service this past weekend. They are angry because they do not want their Church, their identity as a Christian associated with the incoming administration. They do not want people to hear the words “Episcopal Church” and think to themselves, “Oh, that place that welcomed in President Trump,” as if hosting a prayer service that has been ongoing since 1933 all of a sudden becomes a political statement. And yet, that’s what these voices want the Cathedral to do. They want the National Cathedral to make a political statement that while we are a house of prayer for all people, that doesn’t include certain people, and it certainly doesn’t include President Trump. But here’s the rub, when Jesus calls out to the disciples and says follow me, he doesn’t say, follow me at your earliest convenience and only choose the parts you like about following but ignore the rest. No. Following Jesus means giving everything up and following him.

This is not to say we cannot protest or rally. This is not to say we cannot be vocal in our dissent or our approval. This is not to say that we cannot call out the authorities, both political and religious, of our time. But, we also do not get to decide who we want to pray for. We do not get to shut our doors in the face of someone simply because we do not like them. We do not get to shut our doors in the face of bigots, sexists, racists, islamophobes, homophobes, the people we disagree with, the people we despise, for if we did, the church would be an empty and lonely building.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, in addressing this controversy surrounding the prayer service, wrote: “So, should we pray for the President? We can and, indeed, I believe we must pray for all who lead in our civic order, nationally and internationally. I pray for the President in part because Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord. **If Jesus is my Lord and the model and guide for my life, his way must be my way, however difficult.** And the way of prayer for others is a part of how I follow the way of Jesus.”

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This is the lesson of Christ put forth in the Gospel today. This is the lesson of Christ that we often forget in our churches today. If we are truly to follow Christ, dropping our nets at his call to simply follow me, then we must be willing to see the need that is present in our world to spread the good news of Christ to all peoples, no matter how much we may dislike them.

Bishop Curry continued in his response: “I grew up in a historically black congregation in the Episcopal Church. We prayed for leaders who were often lukewarm or even opposed to our very civil rights. We got on our knees in church and prayed for them, and then we got up off our knees and we Marched on Washington. Following the way of Jesus, we prayed and protested at the same time. We prayed for our leaders who were fighting for our civil rights, we prayed for those with whom we disagreed, and we even prayed for those who hated us. And we did so following the Jesus, whose way is the way of unselfish, sacrificial love. And that way is the way that can set us all free.”

Thus we are tasked with an uncomfortable call. The call to follow Jesus, a call to unselfish, sacrificial love, is not an easy one to meet. The call to leave everything in order to

follow him, is not a part of our understanding of how faith works in the modern age. And yet, that's because our faith has been watered down. The actual call that Jesus makes to us, as evidenced here in calling the first disciples, is demanding. It is exact. It is perhaps too hard for us to even achieve today. But that's precisely the point. Following Jesus is not supposed to be easy. Following Jesus is not supposed to make you feel good all the time. Following Jesus is about hearing the good news, spreading that good news, and knowing that in doing so, you are committing to seeing this out regardless of how hard it may be, regardless of how much you don't want to do it for someone.

When Jesus calls out to you to follow him, what is your response?

What is your response when you truly accept all that is being asked of you when he says simply, follow me?

Amen.