



There's a story about a farmer from a rural part of the country. And this farmer comes to visit a relative in a major city. They're walking down the busy and noisy main street, amidst the clamor and confusion and traffic and general hubbub of the city at rush hour. And just then, a fire truck goes by, siren blazing. And the farmer says, "Listen: I hear a cricket over yonder." The relative — the carefully conditioned city dweller — replies, "How can you hear a cricket

in the middle of all this?" The chirp of a cricket in the very core of a buzzing city — we can't hear that, right?

But the farmer, unfazed, says, "I figure you hear what you're listening for." And with that, he takes the spare change from his pants pocket and drops it on the ground. And at the almost imperceptible sound of a few coins hitting the sidewalk, children stop in their tracks, heads turn, notice is taken.

Sounds real, doesn't it? Most of us would hear the coins and miss the crickets. "I figure you hear what you're listening for." That's a powerful statement for us as a Christian community.¹

Today is our Annual Meeting- both a look back and a look forward. Where might we have missed the crickets but heard the pennies hitting the ground? Where did Jesus say to us "Follow me" and we kept right on going with whatever it was we thought was very important and ignored the call to follow. Did you ever wonder how many other people were on the seashore doing their regular business when Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew? Why did they, out of all the people on the shore get the call? And later, what about James and John? How many others, though, simply didn't hear the crickets? Or perhaps the others didn't have the particular characteristics that Jesus was looking for in the early band of disciples.

Each of us has unique gifts and talents. Some of us are entrepreneurs and best when creating something from the ground up. Some of us are best at the next step when the beginnings of an idea or a company have been formed and now some stability is needed to grow. And some of us are workout people-brought in when things have gone south and a vision of what is possible to turn things around is needed. Each of us has a part to play in the life of an organization – including a church – from birth to death and resurrection. As the old saying goes: we are dying from the day of our birth – but it's the journey in between that matter so much. And in our faith tradition, death is not the end but rather a new beginning because we are people of the resurrection.

This is not to say that St. John's is dying except as we all are dying. We must continually be in a process of discernment and movement forward to new ways of being God's disciples in the world. The Pathways to Vitality initiative is one tool we have been using since last spring to help

¹ https://episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/repent-look-signs-kingdom-and-follow-jesus-epiphany-3-january-26-2020?utm_source=STW+English&utm_campaign=c3cd37a999-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_01_19_09_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_06dc88fe08-c3cd37a999-136036241

us consider ways in which we are being called to “Follow me.” We need to be ever more alert to where those crickets are that are potentially new ways of following Jesus.

While change is different and difficult for me and for some of you, part of what I believe we are called to do in following Jesus is to discern where and how our current ways of being St. John’s might need some amendment. Later this year, Ben Wyatt will join us as the Pathways priest. Ben is currently serving 8 months at St. Matthew’s, Indy, with the Rev. Frank Impicciche, and after his 8 months with us, he will go to be with St. Peter’s, Lebanon, where some of you visited last summer. Ben will be getting an in-depth look at three different parishes and three different priests. My hope is that Ben, as a young priest, will help us see ways in which we might stretch consistent with our faith to find vibrant ways of being disciples in this place and time.

This last year has been one of change and transition. Not the least of which has been the deaths of long-time and very dear parishioners. Again, in the midst of death we are also in the midst of life. We treasure their memories and their gifts to us even as we learn to live without their physical presence. We build on the foundations that they laid for us. We honor their memories by learning to live and to grow even as we sometimes find ourselves doing something they used to help us with but now we have to do it ourselves.

We have had great times of fellowship – from the January Epiphany and White Elephant party, the ecumenical Lenten programs, hosting the Diocesan neighborhood gatherings, the three visits to other parishes during my sabbatical, the fall parish pitch-in and so forth. Each of these events binds us together as the body of Christ. Each of these times together helps us build the community that cares for one another in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

Perhaps that ability to become a caring and loving community that both looks within and looks outward is part of what Jesus was searching for when he called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. Each of those disciples went on after Jesus’s death to spread the gospel that God is love. God is with us at all times and in all places.

If you’ve been “churched” for all or most of your life, you’ve likely heard the “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” phrase more than once. And for those of us who are introverts, it’s a scary phrase. I’m not a stand-on-the-street-corner with my Bible shouting “repent” type of evangelist. But I am an evangelist, as are you, as someone who believes in Jesus Christ. My type of evangelism is a quieter, more of a see-how-I-live- my-life type. And, I don’t always get it right. I’m not always patient and kind. I get irked by some people or some things. But, hopefully, you like me, circle back around to trying once again to live like Christ taught us. To repent and return to loving neighbor.

Debi Thomas² in her essay on this Gospel passage talks about the challenge of this passage particularly for those of us who are not extroverted fisher-folk. I’ve always read that passage as one long sentence. She suggests that we can break it apart. “Follow me” can stand by itself with a period. Follow me. Jesus is not calling us to all be extroverted fisher folk – that made sense when Jesus called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. They knew fishing. It was their

² <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

livelihood. It was a metaphor that made sense to them. It doesn't to me. But "follow me" period does.

I – and you- and St. John's- and called to follow Jesus as best we can. We are called to use our gifts and talents to bring the kingdom of God near to earth. We are called to grow and expand and continue to be welcoming to all who come into our doors – and all we engage with in our world everyday.

Jesus wants us to become the best person that we can, using our own unique gifts and talents – not striving to be like our neighbor or the celebrity we follow. We are to be who God has created us to be. And, that is enough. And, that is all God asks of us. Let us go forth into the world with thanks be to God. **Amen.**