

Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
September 1, 2013

Psalm 139:1-12, Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:27-28  
"Follow me"

In the Bible, the psalmist addresses God. He says: "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"

"If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you." (Psalm 139:7-12)

The recent Redwoods Log showed that I took these words from Psalm 139 with me on my recent trip to Europe. Its proof perfect that God is with us everywhere and God is revealed in many ways.

This is the second in a series of how God was present to me on our recent vacation. Suellen and I rented cars in Germany and England and without a GPS we navigated our way through cities, towns and country roads. One theme impressed itself on us over and over. It came in the phrase, "Follow me." In fact, it was given to us four times at various stages of our journey and each time I heard the voice of God.

That's the subject of today's sermon. When we first heard the phrase in Frankfurt, Germany, it brought to mind the ways we hear it in scripture. Three of those ways were just read by Joyce. Jesus meets his would-be disciples for the first time and he says to them, "Follow me" and they follow him for the rest of his life and for the rest of their lives.

The phrase is important for me because 35 years ago I was at a cross road vocationally after working on and off in journalism for 10 years. I wanted to leave newspaper journalism but didn't know where I would go. I spent a weekend praying about it and five times in the weekend I read and heard Jesus saying, "Follow me."

As Jesus called his disciples to follow him so I felt he was calling me. As they dropped their nets or other vocations to follow him in a full-time walk so I dropped my pen so to speak to follow him in a full-time walk. I interpreted this as a call to ministry as a pastor. The call was confirmed along the way just as Stephanie now is discerning her call.

You can imagine how I felt when I heard the phrase for the first time, in a particular context, on our European trip. Suellen and I had just flown 10 hours from San Francisco to Frankfurt, our day, time-wise, was turned upside down, we were tired and exhausted, and drove out of the airport in a rental car to a hotel which on paper was close by but turned out to be extremely difficult to find.

The road signs were foreign and the visibility on the road was minimal as lightning struck the skies and rain engulfed us. We landed on a freeway that took us to nowhere and when we tried to get off the freeway we found ourselves back on it going further and further away from the airport and our hotel.

Finally, we made it back to the airport vicinity by following the sign that had a picture of a plane on it and I understood a little German. We drove into a nearby village and saw a man walking to his car in a parking lot. I drove in and asked him the direction to our hotel. He consulted his wife who walked up in the rain in full Islam Hijab with a baby in a crib. I was taken aback with their kindness.

After further consulting his iPhone the man tried to explain the way but then said, "Follow me." I totally trusted this family, perhaps because of their religiosity shown through their dress, kindness and concern. We traveled through a maze and detours because the storm had downed trees and blocked roads. We arrived safely at our destination. The only compensation was a friendly wave as the family went on their way.

The next experience: We are on a busy street in Cologne, again looking for our hotel. Our map is on the dashboard and this time a cab driver pulls alongside us at a stop light and offers help. We get half our message across when the light changes and the driver speeds off and pulls off the road and motions us to do the same. He jumps out of his cab to complete the conversation with us and says, (guess what?), "Follow me." He takes us to the door of the hotel. We knew we could trust his lead. I said to Suellen along the way that we would pay a fee if we were in his cab. This way he offered us a free ride.

Six days later we are visiting friends in a small town near the Elbe River between Bremen and Berlin. We pass our friends home and arrive at a fire station. A group of firefighters are gathered outside. It happened that they were recovering from a major traffic emergency earlier in the day. We asked the whereabouts of our friends' home and one firefighter says, "You're looking for the Eckert's. They're my neighbors. 'Follow me.'" She jumps in her car and takes us to the door. Here, indeed, was a trustworthy leader.

Finally, we're in a small village in England. Someone suggested we stay at the Spread Eagle Hotel in the next village and we arrive in the village having traversed super narrow country roads and narrower side roads when after traveling through the town there is no sign of the hotel. We see a man stepping outside a market and walking to his car. We ask him the whereabouts of the hotel. He tries to explain but finally says, "Follow me." He pulls off and at this point two people inform us that we have a flat tire. I know that one can drive a modern car a short distance with a flat tire so I pull off and follow the man. My informants probably think I'm nuts. We arrive safely at the hotel and I change the tire the following morning.

Imagine again, this time the Christian applications to these stories. No matter how heavy the storm, how lost we are, how exhausted and tired of life we are, Jesus tells us: "Follow me." We know that we can trust his word. We know that he will lead us through the maze and bring us safely to the place of comfort and rest. It will be a place where we will be revived and strengthened for our journey onward. Like the cab driver we trust that Jesus knows the terrain, he knows the best way to get there and we trust his lead. And like the firefighter, Jesus is neighbor

to the destination and he will take us there. Like a flat tire we might be limping, we might be tempted to stay where we are but we limp on following Jesus and he takes us where we need to go. He takes us to the place of healing. Jesus knows the way. Jesus is the way and we trust and obey.

Why is this important for us on Homecoming Sunday? It's important because Jesus is calling us to follow him anew in this church year. We are called to trust that he knows the way and he will take us where we need to go as a church and to all of us in our daily lives.

Are we limping? Trust in Jesus and follow him. Are we lost? Trust in Jesus and follow him. Are there storms in our lives? Trust in Jesus and follow him. Are we tired, weary and heavy-laden? Trust in Jesus and follow him. Are we looking for a healer or savior? Trust in Jesus and follow him.

The church is a wonderful place – the best place – to learn how to follow Jesus. Here at Redwoods we offer a wonderful worship service each Sunday as the bed-rock spiritual practice in our “walk” of faith. Here we learn weekly how we keep our eyes on Jesus and follow him in all the ways that are helpful for our daily lives in home, work, school and every endeavor.

Our mission, education, pastoral, prayer and fellowship programs and community gatherings support us and the local and global community as we follow the way of Jesus. When we get involved in these activities and actions we follow Jesus in the ways of compassion, care, peace and justice. This positively influences us in all of life. The church is the best support group and resource for daily living.

“As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him...After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me. And he got up, left everything, and followed him.”

Christians everywhere are called to follow Jesus in every endeavor of life. We thank God for God's Word and encouragement as we enter this new church year. Amen.