

July 22, 2012-----Joint Worship Service

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Mark 1:16-20

Called to Follow Jesus

This is the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> version of this morning's sermon. I apologize to those of you who have a translation of a previous version, but the Holy Spirit often moves me at the last minute, and this week is one of those times.

It is necessary today to talk about the tragedy that happened in Colorado on Friday. Once again the United States, and in fact the world! is shocked and horrified at a mass shooting, and this one is not too far from Columbine High School, which knew a very similar tragedy in 1999.

In fact, one of the doctors who helped people this time also worked to help the victims of the Columbine shooting. Imagine having experience in mass shootings! And yet, the emergency personnel in Aurora, Colorado do.

It is a universal reaction for people to be shocked and confused and horrified at the magnitude and the randomness of shootings like this one. No one is complacent about it. People feel sympathetic toward the victims. Many want to help.

Those of us who are called to follow Jesus are no different in that regard. Christians do not have an exclusive claim here.

And yet because we are called to follow Jesus we might have a different reason, and any action we take as a result of this tragedy will have a different basis from those who do not have a relationship with Christ.

We react from the assurance that God loves us all! After all, John 3:16 does not say, “For God so loved some of the people, a chosen few, that He gave his only begotten son...” No, it says “God so loved THE WORLD!”

God’s love is for everything in creation, but people have a special place.

And so, when tragedies happen like the shooting at the movie theater on Friday, God weeps with us and for us, and calls us to remain faithful as followers of our resurrected Lord.

From the beginning, God has called people into relationship with himself. God walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, and their disobedience broke that relationship! They became afraid of God.

They hid, and God no longer came to walk in the garden in the cool of the day, talking face to face with the people he created for the purpose of being in relationship with them.

And after that beginning, God continued to call people to be in relationship and to take a significant role in leading others into relationship as well.

All through the Bible we find call stories----Moses and Miriam, Abraham and Sarah, David, Jonah, and the prophets, and many more.

I chose the call story of the prophet Jeremiah to read to you this morning because the first time I read that passage in church in January 2004, my physical response was confirmation of my call to ministry. Even though I had been a certified lay speaker for years and no longer got nervous to speak in church, as I read that passage that day, my knees shook so badly that I was afraid I would fall down.

In my heart I knew why----the scripture was very personal to me. God had called me and consecrated me to ministry even before I was born! Shortly after that Sunday, I applied to go to seminary.

If we continue on reading the Bible and come to the New Testament, we hear how Jesus said to people, "Come, follow me!" and people responded by dropping everything they were doing and everything they knew to follow him.

As Christians, we are all called to follow Christ. And for each one of us that means something different. No two people are the same. No two people have the same spiritual gifts in the same measure. No two people have the same call.

And yet we have all been called to follow the same Lord!

And because we follow Christ, we react to tragedies and violence the way that he calls us to do.

Some of us, in some circumstances, are called to be physically present to the victims of tragedies. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, God called me to offer hands-on help in Mississippi. And I was able to answer that call by making four trips to help rebuild homes.

Others were called to help financially and still others sent supplies or other needed things.

Some were called to be in prayer, petitioning God on behalf of those who suffered.

And the people of Mississippi are still grateful for all who responded in any way to God's call to help them!

The victims of Friday's shooting need help too. They are hurting, and I believe that Christ wants to answer their cries. We, as the body of Christ, must answer their cries, then. If you are feeling compelled to go, perhaps to stand with the grieving families and speak to them words of comfort and grace, then say "yes" to that call and go!

If you hear that something tangible is needed, send it.

Maybe you can write a sympathy card and send it to a church in Aurora, to be distributed to a grieving family.

And certainly, if you are called, you can pray.

But maybe there is more we can do, some way that we can prevent future mass shootings or other random acts of violence.

Many people develop schizophrenia or suffer from depression or other mental illnesses in young adulthood, when they are away from home

for the first time, facing the challenges of being out in the world without the support of family.

College may be overwhelming. Temptation is everywhere, and some of our young people break under the pressure. Some universities are blessed to have campus ministries, but most do not. Even at the ones that do, there is a limit to what those campus pastors can do.

Maybe God is calling you to help young adults. Maybe you can help Beth Cooper, who is the campus minister at San Diego State, by mentoring or spending time with a student who is far from home. UCSD also has a campus minister who would welcome your help.

Maybe you know a student at another school and you can invite them to spend time with you regularly.

By answering God's call this way, you just might notice signs of trouble and be in the right place at the right time to help before it comes to something like this--- a random act of violence with too many victims. Another time of universal shock and grief.

But even if what you prevent is something much smaller, even if it's only one life you change and guard, it's God's calling. It's what Jesus would do.

He would stop and help. Maybe, just maybe you are called to stop and help.

Because as Christians, we are all called to be incarnational!

What does that mean? Incarnational? It means, quite simply, that we are called to be "God with skin on." By being God with skin on, by being God in the flesh, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus. After all, Jesus was God incarnate, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Jesus was God with skin on, so that God could once again walk on earth, talking with us and making the relationship between us and God visible and tangible and something we could understand.

God sent Christ so that our relationship with him would be deeper and truer, and so that we would know that the relationship is for every person, not just church leaders and priests. God sent Christ to show us what God is like and so that we would know that following Christ is the way to know God.

So, we are called to follow Jesus. But it means more than coming to church every week! It means more than reading the Bible and praying.

Following Christ is not something you do for one day or even one day a week! It's more than saying, "Yes, I love Jesus! He's in my heart!" It's more than singing hymns and taking a Bible class.

It is so much more!!

When those first disciples answered Christ's command to "Come, follow me!", they left behind their old lives, their old ways of thinking, their ways of making a living, their families---EVERYTHING they had always known and everything they thought they understood.

Following Jesus came at a cost. A personal sacrifice.

It meant a huge change in their lives, and change is a good thing, but it is also difficult and scary and costly.

Someone once said that "There is always a cost. Otherwise, it's mere respectability." Of course, we all want to be respectable. But being a disciple of Jesus Christ is about more than being respectable. It's about putting our feet in Jesus' footprints.



Now, it's a funny thing. There has been a lot of talk over the years about what saves us---faith or works. When we read the words of Jesus as they were recorded in the Gospels, we hear Jesus saying over and over, "your faith has saved you!"

And Paul said it over and over again---we are justified by faith--- saved by what we believe about Jesus, not by what we do. We cannot earn our way into heaven by what we do.

And yet in the book of James we read that faith without works is dead! If we do not act on what we believe, then maybe we don't really believe it! If we really believe that Christ is the savior of the world, then that requires some sort of action as a result.

If we believe that what Christ said is true, then we have to answer God's call to serve others, to make a difference in the world, to save lives and souls whenever and however we can.

We have to take action because he told us that the only thing we will be judged on is whether or not we took a cup of cold water to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned.

And if we return to the very premise of this sermon, then we hear Christ's voice saying once again, "Come, follow me!"

There are two verbs in that three-word command, and both of them are action verbs! The first is "come!"

Come! Get up from where you are, from what you know, from what you've always done---COME!! Jesus comes to us, but he doesn't stand still with us where we are. He doesn't let us stay the same! He doesn't let us keep on doing exactly what we've done all our lives! We have to get up and move!

The second action verb there is "Follow!"

Movement is required. And not just doing what we want to do, but following Jesus! Putting our feet in his footprints! We need to know the life of Jesus well enough to go and do the same!

We are the Body of Christ and the Body of Christ cannot do anything except what Jesus would do!

The Body of Christ is faithful to follow where Christ wants us to go!  
And where is that?

In the gospels we read over and over how Jesus went to those people who were on the margins of society. He did not go to King Herod or to Pilate or to the rich and the powerful.

He went to the poor, the sick, the blind and the lame, and the mentally ill.

He went to the ordinary people in the towns and villages. He spoke with those who were rejected by society.

He touched the lepers--- no one else would touch them.

He ate with tax collectors and sinners---no one else would socialize with them.

He spoke with women "of ill repute"---no other man dared to speak with them.

He healed the deaf and blind and lame and the mentally ill----everyone else believed that those disabilities were punishment for sin.

He saved the woman caught in adultery---no one else was without sin and yet they were eager to throw stones at her.

And more---

The only people he had harsh words for were the Pharisees and the scribes, who were judging and condemning all of the kinds of people Jesus spent time with.

He spent time with everyone else establishing relationships and restoring people to relationship with God and with community.

Jesus was all about grace and not judgment. When Jesus met a man who had been waiting for healing at the pool of Siloam for years, he didn't condemn him for his whining about not having anyone to help him into the pool! Instead, he healed him and restored him to society.

Grace, not judgment.

He didn't ask the woman caught in adultery why she didn't take her marriage vows seriously and tell her she deserved to be stoned. She didn't deny her sin, and still, he forgave her and told her not to do it again.

Grace, not judgment.

He didn't tell the tax collectors to get a new line of work that didn't exploit and oppress the people. He sat down at the dinner table with them and established a relationship with them.

Grace, not judgment.

If we are going to follow Jesus, to put our feet into the footprints of Jesus, we need to eliminate judgment from our thinking and pursue grace alone. And we need to step out in faith and do whatever we can to prevent young people, and older people, too! from committing random acts of violence that cost families and society as a whole far too much.

Because that's what following Jesus means.

We have received grace for ourselves, and we need to extend grace to others.

Following Jesus means surrendering our pride, our preconceived notions, our trumped-up sense of justice and fairness, our desires for revenge and retaliation.

We have to be willing to give up our ways of life, our ways of thinking, our ways of acting, our ways of reacting.

We have to stop following what we've always been told. We have to stop listening to the world and even other Christians at times, because they just might be wrong! We have to stop doing what we want to do for our own selfish reasons!

And we have to listen to Jesus. We have to answer his call and make our relationship with him deeper and truer. And we have to surrender all and follow Jesus. Jesus said, Come, follow me! And the disciples got up and left their boats on the shoreline, their nets unmended, and they followed.

They didn't ask "What about this? What about that? What are we going to do? Where are we going to go?" They didn't stop to go get their important papers or their credit cards.

They didn't ask why Jesus invited a certain other person along.

They simply obeyed. They got up and followed, surrendering everything they had, everyone they knew, their careers, their own independence.

They surrendered it all to follow Jesus.

There is an old hymn. Sing it with me if you know it----

#354 in the EL hymnal---

All to Jesus I surrender

All to him I freely give!

I will ever love and trust him.

In his presence daily live!

I surrender all! I surrender all!

All to thee, my blessed savior! I surrender all!

When we do not, cannot surrender everything and follow Christ, we are not trusting the Lord.

Without surrender, there is no evidence of trust. The faith and the action are intertwined.

Faith saves us so that we can follow Jesus. Faith saves us so that our relationship with God can be free of fear because trust is so strong there is no room for fear.

Did you know that there are 365 times in the Bible when God or one of his angels says to people, "Do not be afraid!" That's one for every day of

the year! When we are not afraid, we are freed to trust, freed to love, freed to follow Christ!

We are all called to follow Jesus. Do not be afraid!

You can trust him with everything you are holding onto. You can trust him with all that you are, everything that's in your heart, everything that you think and have always done.

Surrender it all!

Surrender it all to Jesus!

Jesus is calling, "Come, follow me!" Listen! Can you hear him?

What is he calling you, as part of the Body of Christ, to do to help save the world?

What is he calling you to do in the wake of yet another senseless tragedy?

Who do you know who might benefit from your presence, your friendship, your care, your time?

Surrender any doubts you have, any fears, to Jesus

And Come, follow.



The tears of the world are falling fast every day.

How can **you** wipe them away?

There is still much work to be done in this city, and all over the world.

Who will do it if not you? Who will answer God's call?

Come, and follow. Do not turn away! Do not turn back!

Christ goes ahead. Come and follow.

Come and follow.

Say yes! Come and follow!