

The First Sunday in Advent, Year B. The scripture text is taken from John 1:35-42

It is impossible not to know the name of C.S. Lewis (1898 to 1963). Do you know his story? As a novelist, poet, lecturer and Christian apologist, he held academic posts at both Oxford University and Cambridge University in England for decades.

Yet he was a blessing to the both the academic and none academic worlds. His Christian faith can be seen in all of his classic literary works.

Perhaps, you have read or heard of one of these books: "The Screwtape Letters", "The Chronical of Narnia", "The Space Trilogy", "Mere Christianity", "Miracles", and "The Problem with Pain".

It is interesting to note that there was a long period in his life when he believed in nothing at all. In his memoir, entitled, "Surprised by Joy", C.S. Lewis told how he was baptized into the Church of Ireland, but the sacrament had no influence on him.

He walked away from the faith and didn't come back until he was 32 years of age. C.S. Lewis, became a faithful follower of Christ at age 32. He thanked his friends, including J.R. Tolkien, for his spiritual awakening.

It is obviously early in Jesus' public ministry. It is so early in Jesus ministry, that Jesus doesn't even have a single disciple.

That is about to change. According to the text, John the Baptist was with his disciples, when Jesus passes by.

John the Baptist, who always was pointing toward Jesus and away from his own earthly ministry, identified Jesus as the Lamb of God.

With this endorsement, two of John the Baptist's, disciples leave him and follow Jesus. The scriptures identified one of the disciples as Andrew, tradition identified the other disciple as John, (not John the Baptist) but John, possibly the author of the Gospel of John, but we are not sure.

Seconds later, Jesus notices that they are following him and asks them, "What are you looking for?" That is an excellent question because no likes to be taken by surprise.

They answer Jesus' question with another question, "Where are you staying?" Jesus answers that question with an invitation, to "Come and see".

They accepted the invitation and stayed with Him. They must have been impressed. They stayed with Jesus until about 4PM in the afternoon.

At that time, the two temporarily, left Jesus and told others about Him. Andrew told his brother Simon-Peter, who decided to follow Jesus too.

In this story, these three men, decided to follow Jesus. In each case, their lives wouldn't be the same, ever again. That leads to an interesting question.

So I have a question for you? When did you decide to follow Christ? Was it perhaps as a young child, or as an adult? So, what is your story, how would you tell it?

No two stories are alike. No one's story is better or worse than your story. Your story is just that, your story.

Your story may include loving parents who sacrificed for you, when you were just a child. They took you to church, made sure that you went to Sunday School and later to confirmation, so that you would learn about God and His love for you through His Son, Jesus the Christ.

And as you left the nest, and began your life as a young adult, perhaps on your own, your parents were probably hoping for you, to follow Christ, as you continued your life's journey.

So, I think it is safe to say, that a certain time and point in your life, when your heart was just right, God spoke to you in just the right way, then, you decided to follow Christ. Because if you didn't, you wouldn't be here this morning.

Over the course of the years, I have encountered people who were Christians, but came to follow Christ, not so much as a child, or even as a young adult, but later in life, after some type of mountain top experience, or some type of experience in which they hit "rock-bottom" and had nowhere to go but up, and for some others, the call to follow Christ was just in the course of their everyday lives, as they were going about their life and work.

It's interesting, how God works and calls people to faith in Him. Some people follow Christ, literally right out of the starting gate, others don't follow Christ until much later in life, either because they realize that life is short, and you need to be in a relationship with God through faith in Christ, or perhaps some tragedy occurred, and he or she realizes, you may not get a second chance. But regardless, God works in all people's lives and through different situations.

In the gospel lesson for today, following Jesus looks simple enough. Andrew and John are with John the Baptist. Hours later, Andrew tells his brother, Simon-Peter, and he begins to follow Jesus.

John the Baptist, identifies Jesus as the "long-awaited" Messiah, so they begin to follow Jesus. Their decision to follow Jesus seems easy enough, following this itinerant preacher can't be too difficult.

You know, I can't speak for them, (that would be Andrew, John and Simon-Peter), I can't speak for you, I can only speak for myself, but in my opinion, the decision to follow Christ is never an easy one.

Are you following Jesus exclusively? If you are, then you need to prepare yourself for conflict. Following Christ exclusively, means you are only following Him as your Lord and Savior.

Only following Jesus means that you are telling the world that you believe Jesus is your only hope of salvation, and there is no other.

In other words, you are telling other world religions and other world philosophies that they are wrong. No one likes hearing that he or she is wrong, or that your world view, is wrong.

Are you following Jesus unconditionally? It is easy to follow Jesus when life is good, it is not so easy to follow Jesus when life is difficult.

It is difficult to believe in Jesus when you are surrounded by problems. Are you following Jesus passionately?

In other words you are willing to let Jesus change you. The faith that God gives to us through His Word, is not just meant to be a "Sunday Morning Faith", but a faith that is good for everyday, 24/7 as long as you shall live and breath.

In the gospel narrative for today, Andrew and John began as disciples of John the Baptist. Don't forget, that John the Baptist was their teacher, these men were John's disciples.

John the Baptist gave them spiritual instruction, insight, and direction. When John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, (the long awaited Messiah) they listened to John the Baptist, because they trusted him.

This story is incredible, because Andrew and John, essentially, turned their backs on John the Baptist, who had been their teacher, their mentor and their friend, to now follow this man named Jesus.

They were going to follow Jesus exclusively. Ok fellow Christians, are you following Jesus exclusively? Are willing to go tell the rest of the Politically Correct world that they are wrong? Are you willing to be labeled a "Bigot" or a "Hater", Are you?

One of the great stories of the Bible is the story of Job. Everyone knows the story, because somewhere along the line, the majority of us, have heard of Job.

As you know, Job would be considered by modern day American Standards, as one who has achieved the American Dream, Job lived the American Dream so to speak.

Job had it going on, he had wealth, health, a large family, lots of livestock and property. Now Satan believes that Job's love for God is conditional, so he (that would be the devil) begins to take things away from Job.

The devil strips Job of his health, wealth, family, livestock and so forth. Then Job's friends witness his ordeal, and encouraged him to curse God and die. But Job refuses. And of course in the end, God restores Job to his former status, by blessing him abundantly.

How many people do you know, follow Jesus conditionally? It is easy to follow Jesus when life is good.

It is easy to follow Jesus when one has good health. It is easy to follow Jesus when your relationships are sound. It is easy to follow Jesus when you are around people of the same mind-set.

We often forget that there are Christians overseas in countries like North Korea, China, certain countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, and in certain parts of Africa, where they are persecuted by those who practice Islam. I wonder if it, is as easy to follow Jesus when the threat of torture and death is hanging over your head.

This is something that doesn't happen here in America. Yes, there are those out there who hate Christians and in rare incidents have killed Christians, we all know what happened in Southerland Springs, several weeks ago. But these incidents are few and far between.

In our gospel narrative for today, we have three men who decided to follow Jesus without question. Andrew, John and Simon-Peter.

They did not have a clue as to how much Jesus would change their lives. They followed Jesus, because they saw something that was larger than themselves, they saw something better than what life was offering them, they had no clue as to how much their lives would change, but they were willing to take the risk, regardless of the outcome.

But in the end all of Jesus' disciples gave their lives for Him and for His Kingdom. And the same can be said of millions of believers throughout the ages of all times and of all places around world-wide.

So my brothers and sisters in Christ, are you willing to put self aside and to follow Christ? Are you willing to put your agenda aside and take up Christ's agenda?

Are you willing to live by faith, to trust totally and completely in Christ, in both the good and the bad, knowing that faith in Christ is all that matters?

It is my hope and my prayer, that all of us, regardless of our age, our gender, our status in life, regardless of all this stuff, that life brings our way, we are willing to step out in faith, knowing that we live in God's grace, knowing that in the end, when all is said and done, when everything has turned to dust and ashes, faith in Christ is all that matters. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, You have loved us, called us, redeemed us, sanctified us, and set us apart for the work of your Kingdom, through the merits of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Lord God, as we begin this new church year, help us to follow your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord more closely, to love others as He would love them, to be bold in our faith and in our witnessing. Help us to be more Christ-like as we follow you in faith. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.