

Listening and Talking . . . by Rev. Tom Cici

I worked for my father for over 12 years, and I'm very thankful for that experience. But it is a blessed privilege to call God "Our Father," and to be called into such a loving relationship with God. Jesus used the name Abba ("Papa") to describe God (Mark 14:36), as we are all children of God, we are each the image and likeness of God.

When Jesus says, "Follow me" (Mark 1:17) he is calling us to action! Just as Jesus is called "Son of God," we are also children of God, and Jesus calls us to follow him. The goal of the Christian life is to grow into the maturity of Christ who shows us that God is love. Christians follow Christ in allowing God's love to affect the world through us.

Now, the Greek word for *follow* in the New Testament scriptures is *akoloutheo*, and it carries a powerful, strong meaning. It means obedience, a kind of obedience that an employee or soldier should give to an employer or commanding officer. It means love that is unconditional, abundantly gracious, self-sacrificial, and complete love. It means devotion to a great cause, a cause outside yourself and larger than yourself. It means commitment that is unflinching, unwavering, and unshakable.

So, this is serious business here! When Jesus says, "Follow me," he is asking for our devotion, our trust, our service, our loyalty. He is asking for our lives, our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength. "Follow me," he says.



The central imperative in the teaching of Jesus, as a profound wisdom-guide, is to transform our minds and hearts – Jesus' disciples – to live in accord with God's character. God's character is "Merciful, gracious, faithful, forgiving, and forever steadfast in love" (Exodus 34:6). This is the best that anyone can do: to act as God acts.

When Jesus says, "Follow me," he is calling us to receive a gift of a new direction; he is calling us to a new task; and he is calling us to a new commitment which is rewarding. Anyone who says, "Follow me," is giving directions, is going somewhere, and wants us to accompany him. Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus is calling us away from selfishness; away from greed and avarice; away from the worldly powers of counting, weighting, fearing, distrusting, threatening, manipulating, separating, hurting and punishing models which the isolated ego prefers. Jesus is calling us to the spirit of Christ-like compassionate, gracious, unconditional, merciful, and self-giving love. The power of humility and Love in the kingdom of God is so important!

May the One Spirit speak to and through you as we journey together.