

**Epiphany 3 Year A**  
**January 27, 2008**  
**The Rev. Bob Honeychurch**

As I look out on this sea of faces here – and as you look out at the backs and the sides of the heads of the people sitting around you and in front of you today – I imagine you might agree with me in saying that it feels really good to be so “comfortably full” for this combined service this morning. Some of you may recognize some folks you don’t see all that often if you worship at different services, but whom you have known for many years. Go ahead, you can even give a wave to a long-lost friend across the church if you wish.

And so, with all that warm and fuzzy feeling going on inside you, I invite you to sit back, get comfortable in your seats, and just enjoy the experience of being together for a moment or two... Okay, time’s up.

There are four clearly defined sections of our church here at St. James’, separated by the aisles. There’s the “far-left” section, along the parking lot, the “left of center” section, the “right of center” section, and the “far-right” section along the patio. I will leave it to your imagination to see if there’s any connection between one’s politics and where one sits in the church. The thing I notice, though, as I look at you all today, since our 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services make up over 80% of our worshipers which typically gather at St. James’ each Sunday, it seems like most of you are sitting in the same zone you sit in week after week after week. So, I’d like you all to do something for me in just a moment. I would like everybody to stand up, and move to some other zone than the one you’re sitting in right now – and preferably to park yourself next to someone you don’t know very well. And when you get there, feel free to introduce yourself to your new companion here at St. James’. Okay, make your move.

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Is the view a little different for you now from your new seat? I tell you, it sure looks different from this angle. It’s the same number of people, filling the same amount of space. And yet, the comfort of our comfortable seats has somehow been disrupted. If you don’t mind, I’d like you to sit with that discomfort for just a little while.

As Jesus walked along the shores of the Sea of Galilee one day, he came upon two men – brothers, named Simon and Andrew – standing waist-deep in the water and casting their nets out into the lake. And for some reason which never is fully explained, Jesus called out to them, “Follow me.” And they left their nets right there in the lake, and they waded ashore, and they followed Jesus down the path.

A little further along that same shoreline, Jesus came upon a boat that had pulled up to the bank. And in that boat sat three men, a father and his two grown sons... and they were sitting in that boat and mending their fishing nets. And Jesus called out to those brothers – James and John – with the same words that he had earlier called out to Simon and Andrew: “Follow me.” And again, the two brothers rose, and dropped their nets in the bottom of the boat, and clambered over the side of that boat, and followed Jesus along the way.

Four people – two sets of brothers – who had been perfectly happy, perfectly comfortable in their way of life, earning their living from the water, all heard the same voice... all heard the same words. And at the sound of that voice, they all had to get up and move from that comfortable place in life, and begin a search for meaning and integrity and transformation, rather than the search for comfort and stability and constancy that had marked their lives up to that point.

I am the first to admit it... I enjoy being comfortable. I like being surrounded by my own stuff. I like having a sense of rhythm in my life. I like a steady paycheck. I like living in the same place long enough that I can find stuff in the grocery store, and greet the teller at the post office by her first name, and come to anticipate what's going to be popping up next in my garden regardless of what time of year it is.

But I also know that the very things which sometimes give me great peace of mind are exactly the things which sometimes hold me back from becoming the person that God is calling me to be. As much as I am reluctant to admit it, I really do have to come to terms with the fact that when Jesus says, "Follow me," there is no way for me to do that, and to stand still at the same time.

You may have seen on the news the last couple of weeks all of the escalating violence in Kenya. The sectarian strife there has gotten so bad that they have even brought in Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of South Africa to try to mediate a settlement. Tutu was being interviewed last week about the prospects for peace in Kenya in what seems like an absolutely intractable situation. Even with no visible path forward toward reconciliation, Tutu is not willing to give up and admit defeat, for he is, in his own words in that interview, "held captive by hope."

Being "held captive by hope"... that is such a much more poetic way of saying the same thing I tried to say in my rector's message in the annual report. I wrote there that one of my foundational beliefs is that, for me personally and for St. James' as a community, our best days lie ahead of us. Now, I'm sorry to say that I'm not sure everybody else believes that – either for themselves or for this community. There are some who believe that perhaps our best days are behind us... that life is on the wane... that the best we can hope for now is "second-best."

The problem with that attitude, of course, is that if you believe that the past was better than the future, then there's no reason to follow, there's no reason to move forward, there's no reason to believe that God might have "better things (in store for us) than we can desire or pray for." And so, when Jesus says, "Follow me," we don't even hear the words, because we're too busy looking backwards, and pining for what used to be.

That wonderful writer, Garry Wills, composed a book 10 or 15 years ago now which he entitled *Certain Trumpets*, and sub-titled *The Nature of Leadership*. Like so many books of that type, it speaks to an audience of people who are seeking to improve their own leadership skills. But right from the outset, Wills' book re-frames the issue from all the other quick-fix approaches to leadership when he writes: "We do not lack leaders. Various trumpets are always being

sounded. Take your pick. We lack sufficient followers. That is always the real problem with leadership. Calls are always going down into the vasty deep; but what spirits will respond?"

It's not always very comfortable sitting in a different seat than we're used to when we come to church on Sunday morning. It's not always easy moving out of our "zone of familiarity" where we feel safe and stable and secure. But the reason that Jesus said "Follow me" to Simon and Andrew, and to James and John, was that if they didn't follow, they were going to be left behind... if "being comfortable" was going to be their top priority, then they were going to miss the wonderful adventure which lay ahead.

That same adventure awaits each one of us... and it awaits each one of us at the beginning of each new day. The adventure awaits us, as well, here today at St. James'. Will we choose new life or an old life? Will we seek possibility or certitude? Will we crave adventure or safety? Will we be driven by our passions or our passivity? Do our best days lie before us or behind us? Is ours a God of the future or of the past? When we hear the voice, how shall we respond: "Follow me."