

“What We Leave Behind.” – May 28, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Gloria in Excelsis Deo

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St. Mark 1:29-39

For years I have read on cards or viewed on walls, Mary Zangare’s syrupy poem entitled “*Footprints in the Sand.*” I understand the poem’s intent: first two sets of footprints then one set. A witness to the strength, dependability, and comfort of Jesus’ presence.

I believe that, if I did not, then I would have nothing to preach about. I know encouragement and assurance are part of the Gospel message. I am, however, a tiny bit troubled that the promise of comfort is all some people want from their faith.

I am not innocent. I know myself sufficiently to acknowledge that I sometimes want what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “Cheap Grace.” That is, forgiveness without repentance, solace without commitment, and mercy sans loving ministry.

Perhaps another poem needs to be composed: something that starts with Jesus’ steps and then meets St. Peter and the other disciples. As the footprints grow in number they paint a picture of discipleship and “*Followers of the Way.*” Everyone walking behind the Human One whose feet lead us.

What constantly surprises me is where Jesus’ footprints take us. In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus is done teaching in Capernaum. He casts out demons and his reputation is growing. Straightaway, Jesus goes to the house of Simon Peter and Andrew, along with “James and John.” This is an odd expression. We know Jesus has already called these four men and they have followed Jesus, five sets of footprints on their way across the countryside of Galilee.

So, why does St. Mark restate when Jesus goes into the house of two, that he takes two more? As usual, St. Mark doesn’t say, but I have an idea. Before their call,

these disciples had been fishermen, competitors, perhaps even rivals. Simon Peter and Andrew fish offshore and James and John have a boat.

It appears that Peter and Andrew are sole proprietors of their business, but James and John are a part of a family business that is wealthy enough to afford hired hands. I think St. Mark is saying that there were 'issues' between both sets of brothers. Perhaps, resentment or jealousy on Simon Peter and Andrew's part; and arrogance and ridicule from James and John.

The call of Jesus rises above such hostilities and expects that "*Followers of the Way*" will just 'get over it.' Those who follow Jesus come from every stratum of society, and all of us stand in need of God's grace. The call of Christ shapes new relationships that we would have never believed possible before Jesus.

This is one of the many reasons more people are not attracted to Jesus, or do not turn back to him. Not everyone can handle the reformation of relationships. Far too many of us steer our boats by setting our GPS to find the True North of US and THEM. We have already decided who the good and the bad guys are. This is much easier when *personal* means *private*.

It may also be the reason we want our religion to be a matter of *personal* blessing and comfort, *personal* salvation. Jesus "walks with me and talks with me," and the joy Jesus and I share "none other has ever known." It is so much easier that way when the *personal* amounts to *private*.

Reality is different and so much messier. Bodies of Christ are hard to structure and maintain. The author, Kathleen Norris suggests: "*That when people say they do not like 'organized religion'* (as if that phrase makes sense), *what they really mean is that they do not like people.*"

For people to discover God themselves, for us to be 'messengers' of the Gospel, calls for a high degree of distance from oneself. This may be the reason faith is so rare and religion so popular: religion helps us keep our image of God safe, even when such

belief is pathological and destructive. To quote Richard Rohr: *“We feel better with what we know, even if it does us in.”*

Spirituality is a high goal. Religion is one of the ways we avoid faith and God. It was the religious leaders who murdered Jesus. Those who accepted him were the alcoholics, the lepers, and the prostitutes. The truth isn't always where we think. Jesus said to be surprised: *“The first shall be last and the last shall be first.”*

For individual *“Followers of the Way”* and churches to follow Jesus, we must do three things. First, let go of the desire to be successful. Second, let go of the urge to be right, particularly to be theologically right which is the ego. And third, the craving to be influential, to be in control. It's quite possible that these three things may have been the three demons Jesus faced in the wilderness.

We don't know how many were called that day by the Sea of Galilee. My guess is that there was more than four. People who were willing to risk, to forget what they were doing and to follow Jesus. And, not just their occupations, but their mindsets, their prejudices, their place in their village. Anyone who answered the call that day with their feet, followed Jesus into surprising places and beautiful community.

With remarkable subtleness, St Mark proposes all of this with one phrase: *“with James and John.”* It is likely that “the Sons of Zebedee” had never been in Simon Peter and Andrew's house before. Might not have been to that part of town, either. Without Jesus, they had no reason to have dinner together.

When you follow Jesus you discover people who become your friends and family . . . sometimes for the very first time. Alleluia. Amen.