

January 28, 2018 – Soli Deo Gloria  
By Wayne J. Schneider

## In the Steps of Jesus St. Mark 1:29-39

When Sylvia and I pastored in Stanwood, one of our parishioners was the aunt of Gene Kruppa, the famous drummer. She was an unusual, elderly lady. One day I was standing in line at the pharmacy and she was behind me. She grabbed my posterior and said, "*How're doing pastor?*" Upon our leaving the church after nine years, she gave us a beautiful needlepoint rendition of Mary Stevenson Zangare's poem, "*Footprints in the Sand.*"

I've seen this poem on 'get well' cards or framed prints, and I get it. Two sets of footprints in the sand turn into one set that speaks to Jesus being with us, comforting us, displaying his love for us. I believe that and I could not preach if I did not. I know that encouragement and confidence are at the center of the Gospel message.

Having said this, I become apprehensive when I realize that this promise of comfort is *all* that some people desire from their faith. I am not immune to this temptation. I know myself well enough to confess that sometimes I want what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called 'cheap grace: "*Forgiveness without repentance; consolation without commitment; mercy without confession.*"

Honestly, I think all of us want some of this some of the time. But, Bonhoeffer calls us to remember that love is costly, it comes with a price. Following the Way of Jesus is risky business. Maybe it is time for a new poem, one that begins with the solitary steps of Jesus on the beach. Jesus then meets with Simon and the others, and the number of footprints grows, showing us an appealing picture of discipleship and the body of Jesus: everyone following the One whose feet are in the lead. Attrition comes with time and controversy; and fewer and fewer sets of feet are seen, until there is just Jesus' alone in the garden; in the hall of Pilate; making that lonely march up Mt. Calvary.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus has finished his teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. He performs an exorcism, and his reputation is growing. He turns and goes immediately into the home of Simon and Andrew, accompanied by James and John. This is an unusual and intriguing phrase. Readers of St. Mark already know that these four men have been chosen by Jesus to be his disciples. Here are five pairs of footprints making their way from the beach to the Galilean countryside.

So, why does St. Mark emphasize *this* point? Why highlight Jesus going into this house of two, taking two others in tow? St. Mark doesn't say, but I can guess.

Before the call of Jesus, the fisher-people competed with each other. St. Luke states that at least three were partners. St. Mark hints a more divided relationship: Peter and Andrew fished in shallow water, while James and John have a boat. Peter and Andrew appear to work by themselves, while James and John are perhaps a part of a wealthy family business with hired help. This could account for feelings of resentment or jealousy on the part of those fishing near the shore; and disdain and condescension from those working from a boat.

The call of Jesus rises above such animosities, and expects followers to '*get over it.*' Jesus band will eventually contain fanatics, collaborators, educated or not, old and young, women and men, saints and sinners, all of them. Jesus is a remover of barriers.

This may be the reason Jesus is not attractive to more people, why some who follow turn away. Not everyone is secure enough in themselves, or in God, to accept such a radical reorientation of relationships. Many of us attempt to navigate our lives by using our sextants to find the exact north of *them* and *us*. We know who is naughty and who is nice. We tend to keep company with our kind whether ethnically, nationally, or politically. "Class conscious" is almost a part of our DNA now, and it is pernicious and demanding to break down the walls between us.

This could also be the reason we desire our faith to be a personal blessing and comfort, personal salvation. We have 'privatized faith. You know, Jesus "*walks*

*with me and talks with me,”* and the joy Jesus and I share, *“none other has ever known.”* It is much easier, better, and cleaner this way, when personal means private.

Communities and relationships are more difficult to begin and maintain. Kathleen Norris suggests that when people say they do not like “organized religion” (Sounds oxymoronic to me), what she suspects is they mean they don’t like people.

Have you ever reflected on the question: *“How many people did Jesus call that day by the Sea of Galilee? Just these four? Or, did Jesus invite many others to: ‘leave everything behind: social position, employment, prevailing prejudices, and follow him?’* Whomever Jesus called they must answer with their feet; they had to follow him into unexpected places and join a surprising community.

St. Mark’s subtlety is astounding: *“with James and John.”* They had probably never been in that home or even on that side of town before. It is possible that Peter and Andrew would never have had the nerve, or interest, to invite James and John. But, when you are a *“Follower of the Way,”* when you *“walk with Jesus,”* you go places you never thought you would; you do things with people you never considered working with, and you form an additional family that Jesus created, among those whose footprints follow wherever he leads. Alleluia. Amen.