

6. FOLLOW ME (JOHN 1:43-46) 02/12 /12
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

A YOUNG WOMAN WHO WANTED TO GO TO COLLEGE & HER HEART SANK AT THE QUESTION ON THE COLLEGE'S APPLICATION FORM THAT ASKED, "ARE YOU A LEADER?" BEING BOTH HONEST & CONSCIENTIOUS, SHE WROTE, "NO," & RETURNED THE APPLICATION. SHE EXPECTED THE WORST. TO HER SURPRISE, SHE RECEIVED NOTICE FROM THE COLLEGE: "DEAR APPLICANT: A STUDY OF THE APPLICATION FORMS REVEALS THAT THIS YEAR OUR COLLEGE WILL HAVE 1,452 NEW LEADERS. WE ARE ACCEPTING YOU BECAUSE WE FEEL IT IS IMPERATIVE THEY HAVE AT LEAST ONE FOLLOWER."

THE PASSAGE BEFORE US TODAY CHALLENGES US TO BE FOLLOWERS - FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIS. "FOLLOW ME!"

PERHAPS MY ALL TIME FAVORITE BOOK IS CHARLES SHELDON'S, **IN HIS STEPS**. IT DEEPLY TOUCHED MY HEART WHEN I READ IT FOR A CLASS IN SEMINARY. IT WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE BEGINNING OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 1900S. THE BOOK WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1897. OVER 30,000,000 COPIES HAVE BEEN PRINTED & RANKS AS THE 9TH BEST-SELLING BOOK OF ALL TIME. THE THEME OF "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" GAINED MUCH GREATER CURRENCY FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK.

IN HIS STEPS TAKES PLACE IN THE RAILROAD TOWN OF RAYMOND, PRESUMABLY LOCATED IN THE EASTERN U.S.A. THE MAIN CHARACTER IS THE REV. HENRY MAXWELL, PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH OF RAYMOND. HE CHALLENGED HIS CONGREGATION TO NOT DO ANYTHING FOR A WHOLE YEAR WITHOUT FIRST ASKING: "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" **THEN TO FOLLOW JESUS**.

THE NOVEL BEGINS ON A FRIDAY MORNING WHEN A JOBLESS MAN APPEARS AT THE FRONT DOOR OF REV. MAXWELL WHILE HE IS PREPARING SUNDAY'S SERMON. MAXWELL LISTENS TO THE MAN'S HELPLESS PLEA BEFORE BRUSHING HIM AWAY & CLOSING THE DOOR. THE SAME MAN APPEARS IN CHURCH ON SUNDAY AT THE END OF THE SERMON, WALKS UP TO "THE OPEN SPACE IN FRONT OF THE PULPIT," & FACES THE PEOPLE. NO ONE STOPS HIM. HE POLITELY BUT FRANKLY CONFRONTS THE CONGREGATION—"I'M NOT COMPLAINING; JUST STATING FACTS."—ABOUT THEIR COMPASSION, OR APATHETIC LACK THEREOF, FOR THE JOBLESS LIKE HIM IN RAYMOND. UPON FINISHING HIS ADDRESS TO THE CONGREGATION, HE COLLAPSED & DIED A FEW DAYS LATER.

THAT NEXT SUNDAY, REV. MAXWELL, DEEPLY MOVED BY THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK, PRESENTS A CHALLENGE TO HIS CONGREGATION: "DO NOT DO ANYTHING WITHOUT FIRST ASKING, 'WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?'" THEN **FOLLOW JESUS**. THE REST OF THE NOVEL CONSISTS OF CERTAIN EPISODES THAT FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS AS THEIR LIVES ARE TRANSFORMED BY THE CHALLENGE TO FOLLOW JESUS IN EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIVES.

I'M A **LOT NERVOUS** ABOUT THE REST OF TODAY'S MESSAGE & YOU WILL KNOW WHY BY ITS ENDING - YIKES! THERE IS NO ENDING....

THIS SCENARIO FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN JUMPS OUT:
JESUS SAID, "FOLLOW ME."

PHILIP SAID, "WE HAVE FOUND THE MESSIAH."

NATHANIEL SAID, "CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF NAZARETH!"

PHILIP SAID, "COME AND SEE!"

I DO NOT HAVE A PERSONAL & SENSATIONAL CONVERSION STORY TO SHARE WITH YOU - HAVE ALWAYS ENVIED THOSE WHO DID. BUT THERE WAS A POINT & TIME IN MY CHURCH JOURNEY THAT I HEARD JESUS' PERSONALIZED, MATTER OF FACT, COMMAND, "**FOLLOW ME.**" THAT COMMAND HAS GIVEN DIRECTION TO ALL OF MY LIFE. I WISH I COULD SAY THE DIRECTION HAD BEEN STRAIGHT LINE BUT IT HAS NOT BEEN LIKE THAT. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY ZIGS & ZAGS ALONG THE WAY ALWAYS TO RETURN TO THE MAIN LINE, "**FOLLOW ME.**" JESUS HAS ALWAYS AWAITED MY RETURN & HAS NEVER FORSAKEN ME WHEN I DEVIATED FROM FOLLOWING HIM.

HAVE YOU EVER PLAYED "SIMON SAYS?" I DID OFTEN TIMES AS A CHILD & HAVE DONE SO WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN AS AN ADULT. IT IS FUN TO TRY & TRICK EACH OTHER IN BEING ABLE TO FOLLOW WHAT "SIMON SAYS." ONE MISS, **ZAP,** YOU ARE OUT OF THE GAME - THE WINNER IS DETERMINED BY THE LAST ONE STANDING WHO WAS ABLE TO FOLLOW EVERY COMMAND WITH-OUT WAIVERING. JESUS IS NOT LIKE THAT. JESUS ALLOWS FOR GRACE CORRECTIONS & REDIRECTION TO FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS.

WHY FOLLOW JESUS ANYHOW? BECAUSE JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, THE ONE PERSON IN ALL OF OUR LIVES THAT IS WORTHY OUR ALLEGIANCE TO FOLLOW HIM. PHILIP SAID THAT MOSES & ALL THE PROPHETS HAD POINTED TO THE COMING OF JESUS - **NOW HE IS HERE** - WE NO LONGER NEED BE TOSSED TO & FRO BY ALL THE DISTRACTIONS AROUND US - WE ARE CALLED TO SIMPLY FOLLOW HIM. WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS. SIMPLY PUT, PERHAPS, BUT NOT SO SIMPLE TO DO. THE INFLUENCES OF THE WORLD AROUND US CAN BE SO ENTICING.

NATHANIEL RETORTED WITH, "CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF NAZARETH?" THAT IS TO QUESTION, TO CHALLENGE THE ***VALIDITY*** OF JESUS. IT WAS WELL KNOWN JESUS GREW UP IN NAZARETH BUT LITTLE KNOWN HE WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. THERE WAS NO SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR THE MESSIAH COMING FROM NAZARETH. IT SHOULD NOT SURPRISE US WHEN OTHERS CHALLENGE THE ACCURACY OF OUR CLAIM THAT JESUS IS GOD'S SON. SUCH A POSTURE OF FAITH IS UNUSUAL R.E. THE WAYS OF THE WORLD. IT IS A TALL ORDER TO FILL & STRANGE TO CONSIDER THAT JESUS IS ALL HE IS MADE UP TO BE. PROVE IT TO ME! SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE! (DO NOT FALL INTO THAT TRAP.)

PHILIP MODELS OUR EXAMPLE FOR AGAINST SKEPTICISM WITH, "**COME & SEE!**" WE CAN NEVER ARGUE PEOPLE INTO FAITH. VERY OFTEN OUR ARGUMENTS DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD. THE ONLY WAY TO CONVINCING A PERSON OF THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS IS TO CONFRONT HIM/HER WITH JESUS. THE LIFE, MINISTRY, MIRACLES & TEACHINGS OF JESUS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. "***COME & SEE.***" WE NEED NOT SHUTTER BECAUSE OF OUR INEPTNESS. THE PERSON OF JESUS IS MORE THAN EQUAL TO THE CHALLENGE. JESUS SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF - SIMPLY UNFOLD HIS STORY. WHICH IS A PERSONAL CALL TO KNOW JESUS OURSELVES. **DO YOU KNOW HIM?**

NOW COMES THE **UNEASY, UNNERVING** PART OF MY MESSAGE TODAY. I AM GOING TO ASK YOU TO MOVE BEYOND THEOLOGY TO ACTUALITY. SOMETHING I HAVE FELT THE CHALLENGE TO DO FOR YEARS & YET TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW THRU ON WITH A CONGREGATION. I INVITE ALL OF YOUR EARS & EYES TO BE FRONT & CENTER **RIGHT NOW!** WHAT I PROPOSE IS SOMETHING WHICH OUGHT NOT APPEAR UNUSUAL OR AT ALL IMPOSSIBLE TO EXECUTE. YET I AM AWARE THAT IT WILL BE REGARDED SO BY A LARGE NUMBER EVEN OF OUR CHURCH. I WANT VOLUNTEERS FROM OUR CHURCH TO PLEDGE THEMSELVES, EARNESTLY & HONESTLY FOR **AN ENTIRE YEAR**, NOT TO DO ANYTHING WITHOUT FIRST ASKING THE QUESTION, "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" AFTER ASKING THAT QUESTION, EACH ONE IS TO FOLLOW JESUS AS EXACTLY AS **YOU** KNOW HOW (24/7) NO MATTER WHAT THE OUTCOME MAY BE. I DO OF COURSE INCLUDE MYSELF IN THIS COMPANY.

AT **2 P.M. THIS AFTERNOON** I WANT ALL THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO JOIN SUCH A COMPANY (YES, DROP EVERYTHING YOU ARE DOING) TO MEET BACK HERE WITH ME AT THE CHURCH **IN THE CHAPEL (2 P.M.)** & WE WILL TALK OVER THE DETAILS OF THE PLAN. OUR AIM WILL BE TO ACT JUST AS JESUS WOULD IF HE WAS IN OUR PLACES, REGARDLESS OF IMMEDIATE RESULTS. IF WE ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW JESUS IT CERTAINLY MUST BE FEASIBLE TO DO SO. **I HOPE TO SEE YOU AT 2 P.M. !!!**