

# *Fans, Friends, and Followers*

**A Message for Palm Sunday  
Offered by  
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Second Presbyterian Church,  
Carlisle, Pennsylvania  
March 28, 2010**

*This is the last message in six part series on the marks of discipleship. Previous messages are available through [www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons)*

*When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.*

*Mark 11:1-11*

A while back Kari and I were having dinner with some friends. Afterward we started talking about famous people—celebrities, athletes, and politicians—and who knew the most famous person most closely. It was kind of a game, kind of a sad, depressing game. Kari revealed that years ago she swam competitively with a future Olympic gold medalist, one who has long since retired from swimming. One of us once received a personal phone call from Mister Fred Rogers when she

was young enough that that call was a very big deal. Several of us had had personal visits from Santa Claus, but we agreed that that didn't count. We quickly realized that when it came to famous people, we were *fans*, at best. We might have met a celebrity in passing, but it's not like we could tell you much about them from personal, first-hand, experience. It's not like we could call them *friends*. And certainly none of us was in any celebrity's inner circle of *followers*.

The Palm Sunday story reminds us that Jesus has always had many more fans than friends and many more friends than followers.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem hundreds, maybe thousands, of people jumped on the bandwagon. Most of them probably knew very little about him, but what little they knew, they liked. He helped people. He put the Pharisees in their place. He promised a new kingdom. So they cheered him on, shouting "Hosanna," which means, "save us." It was their way of saying, "You've got our vote!" They were fans.

In the midst of that Palm Sunday fan frenzy there was a much smaller group of people who knew Jesus a little better. Maybe they had shared a meal with him or heard him teach; maybe he had healed them. They must have been excited on Palm Sunday, hearing that a friend of theirs was coming into town. I'm sure they were glad to say they knew him. We all like to be able to say we have friends in high places. We like it because we think they can do something for us.

Jesus' fans and friends were leading the cheers Palm Sunday morning, but at the end of the day those crowds were nowhere to be found. Jesus slept that night with the same twelve followers who had been with him for the previous three years. Unlike the fickle crowds, Jesus' followers didn't just want a new king, they wanted a Lord, a leader without parallel. They didn't just want someone who could help or heal them, they wanted a Savior, someone they could trust with their life and their eternity.

It seems to me that the crowd started thinning out right as Jesus was entering the Temple. His fans must have thought he had taken a wrong turn – he was supposed to attack Pilate's palace, not march to the Temple. They wanted him to overthrow the Romans not tables in the Temple. And when he turned over the tables of the money changers and cheats in the Temple, attacking that sacred institution, well, that was too much for people for whom Jesus was merely a friend. All of a sudden being Jesus' friend was going to get them in big trouble. So his fans and friends left Jesus before dark.

Jesus' followers were different. They understood that there is a cost to discipleship. Sure they scattered on Good Friday and even denied and betrayed him, but with only one exception those followers returned to the fold. And in the years after Jesus' resurrection they became the leaders of the movement that turned the world on its head with hope and love and grace.

If you had been there that day, where would you have stood in the crowd? When it comes to Jesus, are you a fan, a friend, or a follower?

Jesus' fans are people who have heard enough about Jesus to say, "Yeah, he's cool." They know what he taught and how he lived. They respect him for his wisdom and admire him for his compassion. Maybe they learned about him in Vacation Bible School or read about him as an adult. They would put Jesus right up there with Plato, Buddha, and Muhammad as one of the greatest people who ever lived. They know a lot *about* him, but it's all from a distance. They don't know him *personally*.

About ten years ago the lead singer of one of the most famous rock bands in the world described himself a fan of Jesus—but not yet a friend—and he knows it. Bono, leader of the Irish Band U2, told an interviewer:

*The most powerful idea that's entered the world in the last few thousand years—the idea of grace—is the reason I would like to be a Christian. Though, as I said to The Edge [U2's lead guitarist] one day, I sometimes feel more like a fan, rather than actually in the band. I can't live up to it.*

*2-20-01 Interview, Found on Preaching Today.com*

Intentionally or not, *fans* keep Jesus at a safe distance. Maybe they're afraid to get too close. Maybe they're afraid of commitment; they want to be able to make a quick get away. Maybe they're afraid of failing or being rejected. Maybe they can't conceive that someone as special as Jesus would want to get to know them.

Friends of Jesus are just the opposite. They've discovered that it's not only possible to get close to Jesus, it's wonderful. Friends of Jesus have tasted the peace and joy that come with knowing him personally. It is one thing to admire Jesus from afar, quite another to talk to him everyday—to share your hopes, dreams, failures, and fears.

Church pews are filled with friends of Jesus. They come every Sunday to visit with Jesus, to be touched by him, to be forgiven, to be healed, to tell him how much they love him, to hear what encouraging word he has to say to them. They come for his blessing on their lives. Friends of Jesus have made a commitment to him because they know that Jesus has made a commitment to them. Not only do they know and trust Jesus in a deep way; Jesus knows and trusts them in a deep way.

Think of Jesus' friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They weren't just fans of Jesus—like the thousands of anonymous people Jesus fed--they fed Jesus! Jesus stayed in their home, several times. They laughed together. They cried together. He spoke to these three in a lovingly corrective way as only close friends can. Can you imagine having a relationship with Jesus like that—a relationship where you shared everything with him, like you would with your best friend?

Jesus said we can have a relationship like that with him. He said:

*You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

*John 15:14-15*

As great as that may sound, you and I can have an even closer relationship with Jesus. The ultimate goal of the Christian life isn't to know about Jesus, not even to love Jesus, but to *follow* him as Lord and Savior every day. Anything less than following is settling for less than God's best for our lives.

Being a follower involves more—and less—than we might expect. In Stephen Ministry training the caregivers are reminded that

*When Jesus called his first disciples, he walked along the seashore and approached two fishermen who were casting their nets into the sea. He didn't say, to them "Go save the world, care for people, heal the sick, and preach the gospel." He simply said, "Follow me."*

*When Jesus approached Levi, a tax collector and therefore to the Jews a traitor, he didn't chastise Levi. Jesus could have told Levi to quit his despicable job. He could have demanded that Levi pay back*

*the money he had stolen. But he didn't do any of those things. He simply said, "Follow me."*

*At the end of John's Gospel Jesus spoke with Peter. This was Jesus' last time to talk to Peter face to face. You would think he would have discussed plans for all that Peter would do. "Peter, go preach sermons that will convert thousands of people," or "I want you to be the leader of the church in Rome," or even "Here's how to handle all the persecution you're going to face." Even after all they had been through together, and all that was to come, Jesus simply said to Peter—you guessed it—"Follow me."*

*Stephen Ministry Leaders Manual, T-18, pp. 9-10.*

About a year ago our congregation's Session set out to describe more specifically what we think disciples do. We wanted to have something to give to new members so they'd know what we are shooting for—and what we think following Jesus looks like. So we came up with a covenant that describes five marks of discipleship. [Note: The covenant is attached to the end of the sermon]

Following Jesus means living and loving like he did. It means inviting people to know God personally and nurturing their faith in God. It means giving and serving in sacrificial ways. It means honoring God through worship—both public and personal. It means staying close to him by pursuing spiritual growth with the same kind of energy that we would pursue a promotion at work or a starting position on the field hockey team.

How are you doing in each of these areas? More importantly, how would you describe your relationship with Jesus this Palm Sunday? Are you closer to being a fan than a friend? Do you have moments of following, but mostly you're a friend? Are you somewhere in between?

Where ever you are, now may be a great time to take a step forward in faith. Last week a wonderful group of people, people just like you, people who used to be fans of Jesus, came forward and said that they wanted *follow* him as their Lord and Savior.

In a few moments you'll have a chance to do something a little like they did; we're all going to have a chance to renew our commitment to Christ. The words are printed right in the bulletin [Note: They are also printed below]. Please don't say or do anything you're not ready to today. By the way, we're going to say

everything at the same time so no one will know if you're saying, "watermelon," or "I will." The point of this exercise is that for many of us it has been a long time since we had a chance to say those powerful words: "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior." And Palm Sunday is a perfect day to renew our commitment.

We don't say these words lightly. Following is often hard—and sometimes costly. No one walks on water with getting their feet wet. Following Jesus will mean moving out of your comfort zone, forgiving when you don't want to, giving when you're afraid to, trading the certainty of childhood faith for the uncertainty of mature faith.

Become a follower anyway. Some of the greatest joys in life are reserved for those who would follow Jesus wherever he leads, far beyond where the level-headed crowds are willing to go.

Several years ago I spent eight days mountain-climbing in the High Sierras of California. I went with an Outward Bound group and I met some terrific people. Even though I had been a Boy Scout and spent lots of time in the woods, this time we hiked further, climbed higher, and strained muscles that hadn't been used in years. We saw places that relatively few people have ever seen. I encountered animals that I'd never even heard of before, much less seen. But then the morning of day eight came and it was time to hike out.

As we got closer to the trailhead we began to hear sounds: radios, TVs, people talking, bacon sizzling on Coleman stoves. Eventually we could see what we were hearing. We were walking through a public campground. The RVs were lined up one after another. I remember feeling self-conscious when I looked at the campers' bright clean faces; we hadn't bathed in more than a week. And I remember thinking that I would gladly trade my right arm for two slices of bacon; we hadn't had meat for more than a week either. But my strongest memory of all is of wanting to say to them, "Hey, if you like this, then you're really going to love what you'll find just a few miles up that trail. You'll have to leave some things behind, of course, but it's worth it. Go! Check out the waterfalls and rock slides. Sunsets to die for. So quiet you'll think there's no else in the world but you and God. Follow me. I'll show you."

A lot of people make it to the edge of the wilderness and set-up camp there. They never take that last courageous, hopeful, step into the unknown with God. But Jesus says to you and me, "Follow me. I'll take you to places you've never even dreamed of."

This Palm Sunday let's follow Jesus to the cross so that we can rejoice with him at the empty tomb. Amen.

### ***Are You a Fan, a Friend, or a Follower?***

*Starting in April of 2009, each person joining the congregation completes this form, committing themselves to following Jesus Christ in their daily living as God enables them.*

*During Lent we have been looking at each of these five commitments, week by week, in Sunday morning worship. You can review all the messages in the series through our website: [GrowWithSecond.org](http://GrowWithSecond.org)*

### ***The Second Presbyterian Church Member Covenant***

As God enables me, I will

- **Worship** regularly (corporately on Sunday mornings and privately in prayer and song)
- **Pursue spiritual growth** (Through study and other growth experiences)
- **Live like Jesus** (in all my relationships)
- **Give** of my financial resources and **serve** our congregation and community (sacrificially and regularly)
- **Make Disciples** (by inviting others into the Second Family, welcoming them, and nurturing others on their journey with Jesus Christ)

Adapted and Summarized from the Presbyterian Church (USA)  
*Book of Order*, G-5.0100, The Meaning of Membership

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by the Session, April 20, 2009

### **Re-Committing Ourselves as Followers of Jesus Christ**

\*The Questions

Who is your Lord and Savior?

**Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.**

Do you trust in him?

**I do.**

Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

**I do.**

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, giving of yourself in every way, and so fulfill your calling as a disciple?

**I will.**

*Dear Friend,*

*I hope you have been blessed by this message. You can request a free audio-tape or CD recording of this sermon by contacting the church office. We also have a complete sermon archive (including audio-files and PDFs) on-line at [www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons)*

*Second Presbyterian Church is a thriving congregation celebrating over 175 years of service to God and God's people. It would be our joy to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. Please consider being our guest for Sunday worship at 8 or 10:30am. Children's Church and infant and toddler care are always provided.*

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