

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Follow the Leader

#### **Follow Jesus into REST**

(Mark 6:30-32)

Study #4

**Introduction:** Busy, busy, busy...

So - how's it going?

We ask this question almost without thought. And almost without exception get a predictable answer:

“Busy” “Blitzed” “Beat” “Behind”  
 “Honking at my tail lights”  
 “Tired” “Overwhelmed!”

It is unusual when someone responds with something other than, “I’m so busy” or “I’m exhausted” when I ask “the question.”

I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that, as a culture, we are busy and we are tired.

These days, who doesn’t know the added pressure of work in an environment that is increasingly competitive?

Then, in addition to work, for many of us there are mounting family responsibilities. And there are friendships to maintain and pursue. And of course there are ministries that we love - but which take precious time and energy to carry out.

And adding to the pressure of these things is the ever present communication gadgets that vie for our attention.

Facebook and MySpace and email and cell phones - with texting - are great for staying in touch. But they all contribute to our never being “off duty.”

Then we come home at the end of a long day and are drawn to watch a favorite TV show (which now, thanks to TiVo, can be watched anytime we want), or surf the Web one more time - when what we really need is sleep!<sup>1</sup> We need rest.

Is my introduction making you tired?

I’ll admit to feeling over-busy these days. Just as it is in your life, there’s a lot going on. I sometimes wonder if there are too many early mornings and too many evening meetings. Perhaps like you, I’m tired.

Do you ever feel like you are spinning a lot of plates and are concerned that you’re going to drop an important one through neglect or exhaustion? Does it ever seem like you are on a treadmill and can’t seem to either find the switch to turn it off or the way to step off?

And does this invitation from Jesus sound mouth-wateringly appealing?

***[Matthew 11:28] Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***

If those words sound like an invitation to the life you crave, I think you’ll enjoy our time in the Bible today.

As we’ve seen in recent weeks, following our Leader will result in an embrace of a life of **prayer** and **community** and **witness**. Today, we’ll see that when we follow our Leader, He will reliably lead us into **rest**.

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers are concerned about Americans’ lack of sleep. We have all heard for years that we need about eight hours of sleep per night. That fact hasn’t changed - but what has changed is that fewer and fewer of us are getting the sleep we need and the resultant loss of productivity and health problems are becoming epidemic.

For the next few minutes we are going to look at a slice of the life and ministry of Jesus. We'll see a several weeks long period that was about as busy a season as any of us have ever experienced.

Leading up to this very busy season was a year's worth of recruiting and nurturing and building relationships.

## Disciples We Have Known and Loved

### Calling Disciples

#### *Chosen by Jesus*

##### Four fishermen (Mark 1:16-20)

Near the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark we read that Jesus called four men, two sets of brothers, to follow Him.

***[1:16] As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. [17] And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." [18] Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. [19] Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. [20] Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.***

##### A tax collector (Mark 2:14)

In the next chapter, Jesus called out to a tax-collector to do the same, ***[2:14] As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.***

##### Others

Along the way, Jesus called others. We know from John's Gospel that He also called Nathaniel and Philip.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John, chapter 1.

And it is sure likely that He made this "***Follow Me***" overture to a bunch of people during the first year of His ministry.

We know that from the earliest days there were many dozens of people who did follow Jesus,<sup>3</sup> including men and women from every station of life.<sup>4</sup>

In the days in which Jesus lived it was not at all unusual for a Jew to seek out a particular rabbi to follow. And these people attached themselves to Jesus as their rabbi/discipler/ mentor.

#### *The life of a disciple*

Normally, of course, it was the disciple who approached the rabbi, asking for the privilege of following. Jesus turned that model on its head and expressly invited individuals to follow Him. But the tradition of the disciple/discipler relationship was well established among the Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Those following Jesus would have had the expectations of any disciple who followed a rabbi. They would study with Him, meditate with Him, learn from Him, adopt His worldview, and imitate His life.

And for at least a year, Jesus allowed dozens - maybe hundreds - of people to follow Him as other rabbis allowed other disciples to follow them.

When this year was done, though, during which time Jesus had been spending almost all of His time in and around Galilee, He determined that it was time to focus His discipling efforts on a choice few, a dozen, to be exact.<sup>6</sup>

After spending a night in prayer, Jesus went up on top of a mountain and called out twelve from among His larger group of disciples.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke mentions a group of seventy, in particular. (Luke 10:1, 17)

<sup>4</sup> Included would be the women who supported Jesus financially out of their own private means. (Mark 15:40; Luke 8:3)

<sup>5</sup> As it was in other cultures, notably the Greeks.

<sup>6</sup> The choosing of the twelve would have come before the Sermon on the Mount. (A.B. Bruce)

## Calling Apostles (3:13-19)

The twelve apostles<sup>7</sup> are Simon Peter, the brothers James and John, Peter's brother Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot.

And it is crystal clear why Jesus chose the Twelve.

***[Mark 3:13] And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. [14] And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, [15] and to have authority to cast out the demons.***

These twelve would be in an especially close relationship with Jesus. They would travel with Him. He would take them into His confidence. They would get His personal attention.

And there would be no delay in this. That personal, intense training was to begin immediately!

As soon as Jesus and the Twelve came down off the mountain, they were plunged into a crush of human need that continued unabated for many weeks, resulting in the single busiest season of Jesus' ministry.

The verse immediately following the choosing of the Twelve finds Jesus and the apostles surrounded by the first of many crowds.

## A Season in the Life of the Apostles (from Mark's Gospel)

### A Crowd in a Home (3:20)

***[3:20] And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.***

We are not sure where this "home" was. It could have been Jesus' own home in Capernaum, or it might have been the home of someone else who was showing Him and the Twelve hospitality.

But as soon as the thirteen of them made their way to this house it was invaded by a crowd.

The houses in most of the towns and villages Jesus visited were not large, so it probably wouldn't have taken much of a crowd to have become crowded.

But there is an immediate crowdedness to such an extent that Jesus and His apostles couldn't even get to the food! That's crowded!!

Word quickly spread of Jesus' presence in the house and of this press of people in the home. Some people started to express concern.

### A Crowd that Caused Some to Doubt His Sanity (3:21)

***[3:21] When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."***

These are His friends - and they are worried about Him. They see Him surrounded by people, not taking care of Himself, giving and giving and giving to the crowds, in a setting where there was not enough time or room to even take a meal.

They believe that He is over-extending Himself. They want to rescue Him from the crowd and are concerned that He's lost His sanity. Sound busy to you?

Others who appeared on the scene weren't so charitable in their suspicions as to what might have been wrong with Jesus.

### A Crowd of Accusers (3:22-30)

A group of scribes - these are the understood "know-it-alls" of the day - traveled to Galilee for the express purpose of taking on Jesus.

***[3:22] The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."***

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word that we translate "apostle" means "one who is sent."  
(*αποστελλω*)

Don't miss that this was a highly charged confrontation. Can you imagine what it would be like to be accused by anyone of such an awful thing?

*“Jesus, You are in league with the Devil!”*

But to be so accused by well-respected leaders would have introduced added stress to an already stressful scene.

And immediately after this confrontation with the scribes, on the same day, while in the same house, Jesus was approached by another group, a far friendlier group, who were also concerned about Him.

### **A Crowd of “family” (3:31-35)**

His mother, Mary, arrived along with Jesus' half-brothers. They didn't even try to get into the house - it was far too crowded for that.

But they sent word to Jesus who was inside that they were looking for Him. They want to help Him. They have heard the reports that He is beside Himself with busyness.

And when Jesus was told that His family was outside looking for Him, He responded, [33]... *“Who are My mother and My brothers?”* [34] *Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! [35] “For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”*

The Twelve are right there with Jesus during this whole exchange. This is their first experience with Jesus since having been tagged “apostles.”

The house is crowded with hangers-on, then with accusing scribes. And at the end of the day Jesus seemingly breaks ties with His flesh-and-blood family in this over-crowded scene. Sound tiring?

Let's continue.

Following the record of Mark's Gospel we are brought to a scene by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. What transpired here may not have happened on the very next day, but it was certainly within a few days of the scene at the crowded house.

Jesus walked from Capernaum to the sea to launch (literally) into a time of teaching. He is soon joined by what Mark calls a **“very large crowd.”**

### **A Crowd by the Sea of Galilee (4:1-34)**

While the *content* Jesus delivered was fantastic (lots of great parables), I'm not interested in delving into that. I'm more concerned to notice the *context*.

Such a great crowd had gathered to Him on this day that there was no place for Him to stand to deliver His teaching. So what did He do?

He got into a boat, put out a little bit from shore and with no mic and no megaphone broadcast from the boat to the shore.

He taught for a good long time, telling story after story to the very large crowd. And then, after He finished speaking to the crowd, He pulled the Twelve aside and explained what all the parables MEANT.

Again, the teaching was remarkable, but what I don't want us to miss is how **crowded** this scene is! People were pressing in on Him to such an extent that He had to teach from a boat.

Well, when Jesus finished this time of teaching He decided that it was time to sail away. You may remember that we saw this scene last Sunday...

### **Parenthetical: Storm on the Sea! (4:35-41)**

They sailed in a fishing boat from the little city of Capernaum south toward the region of Decapolis. It was during this overnight sailing trip that Jesus stilled a storm on the sea with a word.

And as soon as they landed at the shore, they were met by another crowd - a crowd of demons that was tormenting one pitiful man!

### **Crowd of Demons AND People in Decapolis (5:1-20)**

With the Twelve in tow, Jesus cast the demon crowd (legion) out of the man and into a herd of swine. And that miraculous exorcism brought a crowd of people to the scene - who begged Jesus to leave them alone!

After Jesus commissioned the former demoniac to take the Gospel to the Decapolis, He and the Twelve all got back into the boat and sailed north back to Galilee.

As soon as they returned to Galilee, a **“large crowd”** had again gathered around Him and the apostles.

### **A Crowd in a City in Galilee (5:21-43)**

Jesus was immediately approached by a synagogue official named Jairus. Jairus had a pressing need and he hoped that Jesus could meet that need. You can hear the desperation in his voice.

*[5:23]...“My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.”*

True to form, Jesus agreed to accompany Jairus to his home and they started walking, accompanied the whole way by a **“large crowd”** and - of course - the Twelve.

But Jesus walk to Jairus’ home was interrupted!

While they were on the way, a woman who had suffered from a physical ailment for twelve years touched Jesus’ garment. She believed that Jesus had the power to heal and she reached out to Him in faith. And sure enough, the instant she touched Him she was healed!

But Jesus had sensed that power to heal going out from Him. He turned around to discover who had touched Him and identified the woman. He stopped and had a conversation with the woman, surrounded the whole time by the pressing crowd.

Well, Jesus commended her for her faith and pronounced her totally healed!

And while what happened to the woman was glorious good news, Jesus’ decision to spend a few minutes with this woman delayed His trip to see Jairus’ daughter to such an extent that the daughter had died!

Messengers came to report this terrible news to Jesus, saying that there was no longer any reason for Him to come to the house. She’s died. There’s nothing that Jesus can do now...

Jesus begged to differ. He, along with the Twelve, proceeded to Jairus’ home, despite the report of the girl’s death, the crowd following all the way.

And when they arrived at the house Jesus took a few of the Twelve<sup>8</sup> into the child’s room, spoke a word, took her hand - and raised her from the dead!

It is impossible to read these accounts and not be impressed with the quick pace and the busyness of life into which Jesus and the apostles were immersed. It was activity piled on top of activity. They were constantly dogged by crowds and the press of human need.

That pace continues as we trace their travels to Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. They pulled into town on a Sabbath day and entered a synagogue filled with worshippers. Jesus began to teach.

We might have hoped that He would have been received warmly in the town where He grew up, but, well, some crowds are friendlier than others...

### **A Crowd in a Nazareth Synagogue (6:1-5)**

Jesus didn’t get much of a homecoming reception in Nazareth! He was greeted with yawning indifference and skepticism. *“Hey, isn’t that Mary and Joseph’s boy? Evidently thinks He’s something special. Aw, He’s no big deal.”*

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<sup>8</sup> Luke tells us it was Peter, James, and John

And finally, after being “dissed” in Nazareth, Jesus (always accompanied by the Twelve) continued His itinerant ministry, traveling through the villages of Galilee, teaching everywhere about the Kingdom of God and calling people to place their faith in Him.

### **Summary: An itinerant ministry (6:6)**

*[6:6]...And He was going around the villages teaching.*

What we have just seen is probably only a representative slice of what Jesus and the Twelve actually did during the weeks following their having been chosen to be apostles.

But, we have seen at least that during this season Jesus took the Twelve with Him everywhere He went. And in every situation they were with people, almost always with crowds of people.

There came a time, though, when Jesus saw that His chosen apostles needed to be stretched. It happens for all of us. The old routines don't challenge us to new heights. Same-old, same-old routines produce same-old, same-old results.

So, after having toured the Galilean villages as a large group of thirteen, Jesus called the Twelve together to announce a bold new initiative, a change in the manner of doing things that would stretch them and challenge them and build their faith.<sup>9</sup>

He would send them out ALONE!

### **Apostles are SENT! (6:7-13)**

#### **Sent Out TO Minister (6:7-13)**

*[6:7] And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; [8] and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt— [9] but to wear sandals; and He added, “Do not put on two tunics.” [10] And He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town.*

*[11] “Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.”*

While this commissioning is quite exciting, there are details that particularly grab me. Had I been on the receiving end of these instructions, they might have made me nervous.

I don't know what details out of Jesus' instructions here grab you. But the first thing that catches my attention is the part about **not taking provisions** - no bread, no bag (supplies), no money.

I'm a planner. Going on a trip without provisions would not be my preferred mode of travel.

Back in 2007 my sons Ben and Zach and I successfully negotiated a nearly one hundred mile trek of the Continental Divide Trail. We backpacked through the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado over about six days. It was a glorious trip, and I think I've already ~~bored you about this~~ mentioned this in the past.

We left Wolf Creek Pass on a Monday morning, and after enduring a couple of days of mountain storms, enjoyed picture perfect weather for the last several days on the trail. We arrived at Stony Pass (near Silverton) in the middle of the day on Saturday and then hitched a ride into Silverton in the back of some nice people's mini pickup.

It was when we arrived at the end of the trail that I realized that I **HAD LEFT MY WALLET IN THE TRUCK** back at Wolf Creek Pass, one hundred miles away!

When we got to Silverton, none of us had credit cards, money, or identification, and the only food we had was the leftover food from the trail - which, believe me, was neither plentiful nor appetizing.

It quickly dawned on me that we- all very dirty, very smelly, and very unshaven - were completely dependent on the hospitality of the good citizens of Silverton for our welfare. That was, at least for me, not an enjoyable experience.

<sup>9</sup> There is a much more detailed commissioning in Matthew 10.

Here in Mark 6, Jesus has sent the Twelve on a preaching tour. While gone, they were just as totally dependent on the hospitality of the good citizens of Palestine as they traveled preaching the Gospel - no bread, no bag, no money.

What part of Jesus' pre-trip instructions would have grabbed you?

- Do you like having changes of clothing on a trip? If so, Jesus' instruction to not put on two tunics might have seemed restrictive.
- Are you slightly uncomfortable with the whole idea of spiritual warfare? Then the Lord giving you authority over demons and telling you to cast them out might have been a bit unnerving.
- Don't feel terribly at ease mingling with strangers? Then taking up residence with whoever would have you might have been intimidating.

And there are other details about the journey Jesus is commissioning the apostles to take that deserve some attention.

Jesus sent them out two-by-two. Have you ever wondered what would have been the pairings?

Would anybody have wanted to be paired with Judas? Would Jesus have put the politically extreme Simon the Zealot with Matthew, the tax collector? Would the person teamed with Simon Peter ever get a word in edge-wise? Wouldn't doubting Thomas be a wet blanket on this trip?

Fascinating dynamics, to be sure!

At the same time, while there would have been challenges and questions, there would have been, mostly, excitement about this venture into missionary service.

Each of the Twelve apostles had seen Jesus do exactly what He was now giving them authority to do. How thrilling to think that they would be preaching, casting out demons, healing the sick!

And at the end of the commissioning, off they went.

***[12] They went out and preached that men should repent. [13] And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.***

That's what we know about their journey. Not many details are given. We are not told how many cities they visited or for how long they traveled around by twos.<sup>10</sup>

We do know, though, that at the end of their traveling, they returned to Jesus to give trip reports.

### **Sent Away FROM Ministry (6:30-32)**

***[6:30] The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.***

Can't you just picture the excitement of their reporting!

*"Jesus, You wouldn't believe it! We preached with power - you should have heard Peter. And even Thomas healed people. It was wild. Matthew cast out demons. It was great!"*

And after He had heard everything they had to tell Him, ***[31]...He said to them, "COME AWAY BY YOURSELVES TO A SECLUDED PLACE AND REST A WHILE."***<sup>11</sup>

Fascinating.

After what has appeared to be a very successful mission by the Twelve, Jesus did not give them a pep talk and send them out again for a second missionary journey.

No, with continuing needs abounding and open doors all around, Jesus whisked the twelve apostles away from the crowds for a time of rest and refreshment, a season of solitude, a time-out.

<sup>10</sup> There is the parenthetical section, inserted at Mark 6:14-29, about the death of John the Baptist. It is included here because of the reports Herod (NOT Herod the Great, but Herod's son (Antipas), who was the Governor of Galilee during Jesus' life, received about effectiveness of the ministry of the Twelve.

<sup>11</sup> Note that this attempt to get away was foiled by the crowds' running around the lake and arriving at their destination before Jesus and the apostles did.

## Conclusion:

And this is what I've wanted us to see today.

That Jesus, our Leader, will reliably lead us into times of active, full, engaged ministry. The Gospel of Mark is especially clear about this!

There is a breathlessness to the way Mark tells the story of Jesus. Thirty nine times in Mark we read the word "*immediately*" as we watch Jesus move from crowd to crowd to crowd to miracle to teaching.

But we also see that following our Leader will just as reliably lead us into times of rest and refreshment.

It is so tempting for you and me to think that we must always be on the go. Always doing good things. But then we notice that Jesus took the Twelve away from people to do nothing but rest.

In doing this He was leading them into a pattern that we see Him regularly following, Himself.

- When He received the news of John the Baptist's death, He withdrew to a lonely place apart, away from people. (Matthew 14:13);
- Following the healing of a leper Jesus "*withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.*" (Luke 5:16)
- As He prepared for the experience of crucifixion, Jesus sought the solitude of the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).

So often, we find Him recuperating after a challenging season with rest and preparing for a challenging season with rest.

You are busy doing good things. Work things. Friend things. Family things. Ministry things.

When are you taking off "*to a secluded place [to] rest a while*"?

When was the last time you were alone? Really alone. On purpose alone?

In times past I've been impressed with the need for margin in my life BUT that this is a lesson that - at least for me - is not learned once and

for all. It must continually be relearned, especially given the pace of life today.

What are some steps into solitude and rest? The first thing we can do is take advantage of the "little solitudes" that fill our day.

- Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family wakes or before your fee hit the floor.
- Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day.
- There is the solitude of bumper-to-bumper traffic during the freeway rush hour.
- Slip outside just before bed and taste the silent night.

Taken advantage of, these are little moments that can help us to be genuinely present where we are.

What else can we do?

- We can find or develop a "quiet place" designed for silence and solitude.
- We could set aside a portion of our home for solitude.
- We could designate a special chair as a place of solitude.
- We could find a place outside - a spot in a park, a trail on the church property, etc...
- Take a retreat once a year with no other purpose in mind but solitude.

In recent weeks we have seen that if we would follow our Leader, we will make worship a priority; we will make witness a priority; we will embrace the importance of community.

Today, it becomes clear that if we would follow our Leader we will give space for solitude and for rest.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Life Together titled one chapter "The Day Together" (on community) and the following chapter "The Day Alone." He writes, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one

Like Jesus, we must, with some regularity, be away from people so that we can be truly present when we are with people.<sup>13</sup>

He doesn't call us to isolation or to a monastic life. But He does call us to a balanced life, where we take energizing breaks from people so that we can give energized service to people.

Jesus calls us to follow Him into REST.

*[Matthew 11:28] Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*

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who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Merton: It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them...Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are.”