

Follow My Lead

[Text - Mark 1:4-11]

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Beginning with his Baptism - the starting point of his public ministry - and continuing throughout that entire ministry, Jesus displays a deep desire to connect with the entire spectrum of humankind. This is something that's sometimes lost in today's spiritualized and sanitized images of Jesus; but it's a quality that isn't lost on his enemies, or even his closest friends. Jesus' detractors often try to discredit him as being a party-hardy-hedonist who runs with the wrong crowd and enjoys the physical pleasures of Life way too much. And at times, even his own followers try to keep him from those people or situations that might prove embarrassing, or too "earthy" - like talking with a sinful Samaritan women at a well, or touching and blessing those messy children. Yet Jesus chooses to embrace the fullness of Life, wherever he encounters it; and to experience all that Life has to offer.

At his baptism, as he stands in the Jordan River - feeling wet and gritty - Jesus is preparing to get-down to the nitty-gritty of his mission. In that moment of *epiphany*, he realizes the shared humanity - and *Divinity* - of every person around him. And Jesus is ready to take-on the hard - yet joyful - work of graciously sharing that good news with all those he encounters: so that they, too, might recognize themselves as beloved children of the Holy One!

By lifting-up people who routinely feel put-down by an oppressive religious structure, Jesus begins to set those people free. He knows, that as long as they feel that they must somehow earn Divine acceptance and love, they'll never be able to freely love the Holy One, or to fully love one another. As long as any religion

promotes the idea that Divine Love is in short supply - available only to a select group of super-righteous individuals - then people will basically watch-out for themselves, Because if we believe that we must somehow compete for Divine favor, then we'll always be pointing at others as being inferior or less worthy than ourselves. However, when we begin to trust in the overflowing abundance of Divine Compassion and Grace, then we are set free to live as genuine children of our One Divine Source!

Jesus Christ comes to bridge that perceived gap between the Holy and the Human, and to break-down the barriers that people place between themselves and God, or between themselves and others. By standing in the waters of Baptism; by humbly kneeling to wash the dirt from his followers' feet; by sweating and struggling under the weight of a cruel cross, Jesus demonstrates his willingness to get wet and dirty, vulnerable and bloodied. He is prepared to take-on the entire scope of the Human experience: pleasure and pain; joy and sorrow; living, and even dying. He does this, not to establish a new religion; but to re-establish an honest and open, living and loving relationship between the Sacred Source of Life and the entire Human Family. And he shows us that the way to *righteousness* - to living *rightly* - comes by fully embracing our own humanity, and by accepting the humanity of all those around us. For when we do this, we re-discover the Divine Spirit which connects us all!

With his baptism, and throughout his life, Jesus expresses his tremendous love for the Holy One, by passionately loving and caring for the people around him. And this is precisely what you and I are called to do today: to faithfully follow the Way of Jesus Christ:

A Way of Life that is more concerned about our treatment of others, than our theological correctness;
One which affirms people's potential, rather than focusing on their brokenness and pointing-out their problems;

Where meeting human need with compassion and grace, is valued above maintaining our own personal power and privilege; A way of Life that is about embracing Life to the fullest - not just our own lives, but the lives of every person we encounter.