

## **“It All Begins with Trust”**

**John 1:43-51**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

January 14, 2018

This morning I want to introduce our theme for 2018: **FBC263**. A catchy theme like this certainly requires explaining and interpreting.

This theme grew out of a discussion our staff and the Spiritual Formation Advisory Team had about a book we read by Mark Tidsworth, Shift: Three Big Moves for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church. In this book, Tidsworth reveals the word Christian is mentioned three times in the New Testament. The word Christianity is never written. The word disciple or discipleship is repeated 263 times.

Needless to say, this caught our attention and peaked our interest. It led to discussions about why the word disciple was chosen so often by the biblical writers to describe those who followed Jesus. What message were they sending their readers about what it means to follow Jesus and to feed his sheep?

This year, let's discover that message and the difference it can make in practicing our faith. I'll preach on texts that shed light on what it means to be a disciple, and the Spiritual Formation Advisory Team will offer small group studies and other opportunities that will help us to delve even further into these texts and topics.

Two questions bubbled up out of discussions about our theme: **FBC263**.

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

What does it mean to feed Jesus' sheep?

The first question is based upon the way Jesus called some of his earliest disciples as he began his public ministry. “Follow me,” Jesus simply said as he invited them to join him in the work God sent him to do. (John 1:43)

The second question is linked to the discussion Jesus had with Simon Peter after the resurrection. Sitting around a charcoal fire at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. When Peter assured Jesus he did, Jesus replied by telling Peter to feed his sheep or his lambs. (John 21:15-19)

This winter we’ll turn our attention to Jesus’ call to his disciples. In the fall, we’ll focus on Jesus’ conversation with Peter after the crucifixion and resurrection.

**How would you finish this sentence: The call to follow Jesus is a call to...?** In the weeks to come, I want to fill in the blank as a means of beginning this discussion. You have a handout in the bulletin today that helps you to see where I’ll be going with this sermon series.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to trust, to learn, to pray, to forgive, to serve, to encourage, to love, to sacrifice, to give and a call to obey. Many other ideas can and will be added to this list in our small group discussions, but the sermons in this series will focus on these topics.

Let’s start this morning with where I believe discipleship begins—with trust.

**For me, the call to follow Jesus is a call to trust God.** It is a call to trust in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

We must believe God knows us, cares for us, loves us and is always working on our behalf to help us achieve our potential, in good times and bad.

We must also believe God wants to partner with us to make our world a just, fair, safe and peaceful place for all people so they, too, can reach their potential.

I am convinced this is what Jesus believed, and so must we. The call to follow Jesus begins with trusting the God he tenderly and affectionately referred to as Abba, Father.

**The call to follow Jesus is also a call to trust Jesus.** Andrew and Peter did. When Jesus issued that invitation to them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, these busy fishermen dropped their nets and followed him.

The next day, Philip trusted Jesus and followed him. Nathanael, on the other hand, was skeptical. When Philip approached him with the good news about Jesus, Nathanael blurted out, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46a)

Obviously, an arrogant Nathanael did not think so.

“Come and see,” Philip said to him, reminiscent of Jesus’ words in the previous text when he called some earlier disciples. (John 1:46b)

Nathanael scaled down his attitude and put down his defenses long enough to accept Philip’s invitation. And wasn’t he glad he did? At some point in the conversation between Nathanael and Jesus, Nathanael boldly declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” (John 1:49)

It did not take long for Nathanael’s skepticism to turn to confidence. To his surprise, Nathanael saw Jesus not as he expected based upon his impression of Nazareth or his observation of some of the self-absorbed and self-serving religious leaders. Instead, he sensed Jesus to be an authentic, genuine, caring, compassionate, humble, informed, wise and trustworthy man of integrity who loved God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength.

He saw Jesus as a beloved teacher, a strong leader and the true King of Israel. He believed Jesus to be a brave man of quiet love whose passion and purpose was to fulfill God’s hopes and dreams for the world God created.

Nathanael saw God in Jesus in ways he had never witnessed.

No wonder Nathanael followed Jesus. He trusted him.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to trust Jesus as Nathanael did. This is where discipleship begins.

**The call to follow Jesus is also a call to make hope visible everywhere we go to everyone we meet every day we live upon this earth.** The disciples' call to follow Jesus was not temporary or part-time. Neither was it a call that would allow the disciples to live by the world's standards and expectations.

This call was disruptive and transformative. It would change the way the disciples believed and lived from that day forward.

It was a lifelong commitment to value love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over violence.

For the earliest disciples, the call to follow Jesus was a call to become passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, giving people another chance and building bridges of goodwill, understanding, reconciliation and hope instead of erecting walls of suspicion and hate.

This was why the call to follow Jesus did not come to these disciples with a map, a blueprint, an itinerary or an agenda. It was a call to adopt Jesus' attitude, values, priorities and lifestyle wherever they went and to embrace his mission of taking hope and healing to all they encountered.

What Jesus needed his followers to do could be done anywhere, and the same is true for us. There is no place or time when we are exempt from being the presence of Christ.

When the situation calls for someone to make hope visible, we step up and do it, and this can be done in the home, the workplace, the classroom, the civic club, the neighborhood, the grocery store, a hospital, a ball park or in another state or on foreign soil.

This is why Jesus simply said, "Follow me," when he talked about the work he was sent by God to do and invited them to join him. It was his way of telling people he would go

wherever they went so he could guide them as they made hope visible to people living in despair.

It all begins with trust as the title of the sermon indicates. The call to follow Jesus begins with trusting God like Jesus did, trusting Jesus like Nathanael did and making hope visible as the disciples did.

**Will you follow Philip and Nathanael's example today by trusting Jesus and following his lead wherever you go? I'll be glad to help you take that first step of faith.**