*Introduction*

What is it that makes us follow another person?

Why do men and women follow something that takes their all, and yet gives nothing in return.

What is it that makes a good leader of men? that spurs others on to follow him or her onto acts of heroism and even death?

When I was a firefighter, I knew men that I would have followed into an inferno because they ouzed leadership. They had knowledge and experience, character and wit.

In the police I knew of senior officers that could lift you up and give you courage in dangerous situations, men you trusted with your life.

What is it about people like that, that makes you follow them.

When Jesus walked the earth, at the start of His ministry, what was it about him that made the fishermen leave their nets and their livelihoods and follow Him?

As Jesus walked around with his disciples he said some amazing things which really make you stop and think - Why would I follow Him!

When meeting with the rich young ruler we read after the man said he had kept all the commandments:

***Matt 19:21-23Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.***

There are other verses that show the cost of following Jesus:

***MATT 8:22But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’***

***MATT 10:37-38‘Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.***

***MARK 8:34-35Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.***

Of course we know that many did follow Jesus, having given up everything. The cost is everything! All material things, have to become as nothing. The family have to be less than Him, One must deny yourself and take up your cross, in other words, become nothing in the world and expect persecution.

Well, that's quite a sales pitch for joining the team Jesus!

Well actually, all through the Bible men and women are being called to leave all and follow:

Famously we have Abram who is told to get up and leave, to go to a place that he did not know - because God told him to.

Moses gave his life as an Egyptian prince because God had a greater call on his life.

Joseph suffered and lost all but kept following God.

Joshua made the choice for Him and his family to follow God

Job, despite his predicament continued to follow God.

The point is, this morning:

***Jesus leads by example.***

The disciples followed Jesus, he was with them, they could see him, hear him, watch him and know that he practiced what he preached.

But we cannot see him, so why should we follow him?

As a leader of men back in the Fire Service, I would never ask anyone to do something that I would not do.

I remember at a very large fire seeing part of a building that had a small doorway in it. The fire was coming out of this doorway like a blowtorch and a more senior officer to me was ordering 2 men in breathing apparatus to go into this part of the building. But I could see that it was too dangerous, it was in my opinion unsafe, so I stepped in and told them not to go in.

The senior officer, countermanded me, but I refused to budge. As we 'discussed the situation, the building collapsed, those men would have died.

When Jesus says to us "Follow me" and give up family, jobs, wealth, and be prepared for persecution, we can trust him, we can follow him because he has been there.

Jesus knew what it was to lose his friends.

Matt 26:14 ***Then one of the twelve - the one called Judas Iscariot - went to the Chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?"....Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.***

Jesus knew exactly what it was like to be betrayed buy a friend for money.

Have you ever been betrayed by someone. Someone ever 'dobbed' you in?

It hurts.

Matt 26:56 ***Then all the disciples deserted him and fled***

Humanly speaking Jesus was alone when he was taken to Caiaphas and Pilate. Being alone is not a nice feeling, especially when you know what's coming.

Matt 26:67 ***Then they spat in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?***

Have you ever been spat at - in the face?

Its horrible, its invasive, its dirty, I had a prisoner spit in my face twice, it is actually worse than being punched.

Luke 22:61 ***The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter*** (after the cock had crowed three times)

The pain in that look as he saw his friend, having denied him.

Then he is taken to Pilate.

Pilate sees no wrong in Him but the mob have turned against Jesus and are now baying for his blood.

Crucify him! Crucify him! - but why?

They choose a convicted murderer over him - the gentle healer, their Messiah.

Pilate has him **flogged** than hands him over for crucifixion.

At this point, surrounded by Roman soldiers, who hate the Jews, his is stripped, then draped in a scarlet robe and has a crown of thorns pushed onto his head.

They kneel before him and mock him again,(Matt 27:27-31) Hitting him around the head. They are having fun, Jesus is suffering.

They put his clothes back on him and lead him out to crucify him.

As he staggers to Golgotha, the crowd are still shouting at him, jeering. He is alone.

They take away his clothes and crucify him.

He has absolutely nothing, what he did have has been taken away. Those watching are still making hurtful comments and even a thief next to him is shouting at him.

Then after all of that he cries out **"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matt 27:46)

The Lamb of God is slain, he breathes his last and gives up his Spirit. He dies totally alone, without friends or family, or Father.

No possessions, He literally took up his cross and he followed in obedience to the Fathers will.

He leads by example.

***Conclusion***

Why?

Why does the Son of God go through all this?

Well, it is partly so that when you are going through a rough time in following Him, He can say to you "Come on" I've been there". When he says 'follow me' - He knows exactly what He is calling you to.

He has been through the trauma of loss,

He knows what its like to be lonely,

He knows what it is like to be beaten and spat upon,

He knows what its like to be betrayed.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God has led by example - and is worth following.

A Greek Monk by the name of John of Carpathos in the 7thC said

*"When you follow the Lord with burning love, it may happen that on the road of life you strike your foot against the stone of some passion and fall unexpectedly into sin; or else, finding yourself in a muddy place, you may slip involuntarily and fall headlong. Each time you fall and in this way injure your body, you should get up again with the same eagerness as before, and continue to follow after your Lord until you reach him."*

Cecil Francis Alexander, the Irish Hymn writer wrote in his hymn "There is a green hill far away"

*Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's tempestuous sea*

*Day by day His sweet voice soundeth*

*Saying 'Christian, follow me'.*

But He also went through all of that to show you the extent of Gods love for you as an individual.

The Bible tells us that we have all sinned, we have all fallen short of the target, that was the case from the moment we were born. We were formed in sin, we were born into sin and we live in sin. (Rom 3:23)

In God's eyes that sin has to be dealt with, it cannot be ignored. It has to be punished.

The punishment for sin is death (Rom 6:23)

But Jesus went through the shame of the cross, the suffering of the cross, the loneliness of the cross, the wrath of God upon the cross, death upon the cross - so that you would not have to. So that you can go free, so that you can have life, life eternal.

In order to obtain this freedom, this life, we have to do one thing - FOLLOW JESUS.

When Jesus says "Follow me", what does that really mean?

It means stop going your way and go His - The Bible calls it Repentance

It means believing in Him - not just that a person called Jesus lived, but that he is who he said he was, - The Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

It means asking him to come into your life and be the LORD of your life, it means giving him everything you are and have.

It means walking with Him in obedience.

Are you following Jesus?

or are you still in your sin, unforgiven, with no hope for eternity.

Is he speaking to you right now.

A convert from Sikhism to Christ by the name of Sadhu Sundar Singh at the turn of the 20th C said:

*"I am not worthy to follow in the steps of my Lord, but, like him, I want no home, no possessions. Like him I will belong to the road, sharing the suffering of my people, eating with those who will give me shelter, and telling all men of the love of God."*

He also said:

*Those who determine not to put self to death will never see the will of God fulfilled in their lives. Those who ought to become the light of the world must necessarily burn and become less and less."*

Jesus said:

***John 14:6 ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***

Who are you following?

Let us pray.