

Fil-Am Community Church

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Not a Fan part 1

FAN OR FOLLOWER?

Luke 9:23

Years ago, I owned a small-size store. In the front part of the store, I sold Christian books and in the back part I sold groceries and cooked food. In fact, there were a couple of tables where people could eat. That store catered to the spiritual and material needs of people. It was located right in the heart of Jersey City, along West Side Ave, some of you may be familiar with the area, and I lived just a block behind the store. I was still single then. My parents were living with me and my brother-in-law as well who I asked to live with us for a few months, leaving my sister and their two kids in California, in order to help me start the business.

The store did well. Scores of people came and went either to buy books or groceries or read while eating which is an idea that Barnes and Noble copied. At the time I had a full time job in New York. I was a programmer at Morgan Stanley. So, my parents took care of business during the day. My mom and brother-in-law shared the cooking chores while my dad manned the cash register. Business was brisk. My brother-in-law even brought cooked food during lunchtime to Filipinos who worked at Exchange Place, a business district in Jersey City. When I came home at night, I just checked the inventory, tried to balance the books and then retire at around midnight.

It was like this for many months. Until it came to a point when I had to make a decision. I had to make a choice. Because business eventually slowed down. I knew that if I wanted to grow the business I had to be there 100%. I had to commit myself. I had to supervise from morning till evening. It meant I had to quit my job. Was I ready to do that?

Whatever you're thinking, you understand that moment. There's a moment when we all have to make a decision. Is this a part-time thing or is this a career? Is this for fun or for something more? Am I trying this out or am I investing in it?

These kinds of moments aren't unique to the business world. I think a much more common experience lies in the realm of relationships.

Show Video (Sermonette 1)

Over the next several weeks, I want all of us to examine our relationship with Jesus. Now maybe there's someone here who feels like this is kind of a first date, and you're not exactly sure what to make of any of this. Well, you can just kind of sit and listen. Maybe you're not ready for that talk yet. But I think most of us in this room need to have a DTR talk with Jesus. We need to define the relationship, find out where we stand with Jesus.

And to look at Christ's invitation, we'll be using a verse that clearly lays out what it means to be a follower of Christ. It's Luke 9:23, and it reads, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

I think many of you welcome this DTR talk, because you are ready to move to a different level of commitment. You're ready to move past the casual and past the convenient into something more devoted, something more committed. So you're ready for this talk. Some of you are not, because you kind of like the set-up you have with Jesus. I mean, He is a nice guy and you like church—it gives you something to do on the weekend—and it's awfully nice that we can sip some coffee and munch a little bread while we're here. You kind of like what you have going, and this idea of being more committed, this idea of taking it to a different level? You get a little anxious. Maybe you even go into the "fight or flight" response. But what we want to do is to define the relationship. Where do you stand with Jesus Christ?

And here's how I'd like to ask that question: Are you a fan or a follower of Jesus? Now, some of you are wondering why I'd ask a question like that. We're all followers of Jesus, right? That's why we're here. Don't jump to your answer too quickly. Hear me out.

The word fan is defined as “an enthusiastic admirer.” We’re all fans of different things, right? Many of us are sports fans. We watch the games. We cheer on the team. Some of us own the jerseys of our favorite players. We understand the concept of being a fan of sports. When I was young I was a fan of Crispa, the best basketball team the Philipines ever had. Toyota fans here would dispute that, of course.

Anyway, my concern is that our church has the potential to very easily become a building full of fans of Jesus. And Jesus never cared about having fans. If you define a fan as an enthusiastic admirer, then fans were not important to Him. You see, I think we have a tendency to come together once a week and be fans of Jesus. We sit down in our seats and we open up our programs. We applaud at certain times and we leave somehow thinking that, as the fans, it was all done for us. We get in the car and we evaluate the sermon, and we kind of give the service and song selection a thumbs up or thumbs down. And we come back and do it again the next week.

And I get the fact that some of you are really big fans. I mean, you’re really into all of this. You know all the songs and you know exactly where the book of Micah is in the Bible. You know where to turn. You’re pretty fast, and you kind of look around to see how much faster you are than everyone else, keeping your Sword Drill abilities in shape. You’re big fans of Jesus. And being a fan feels pretty good.

We can feel pretty good about ourselves because we’re these great admirers of Christ, but He never cared about having fans. So if we’ll be honest with ourselves, if we’ll really search our hearts and begin to define our relationship with Jesus, there are three questions for you to answer. The first is this:

1. Why Are You Here?

If you read through the Gospels, Jesus, at different points in His ministry, would draw a line in the sand and He would separate the fans from the followers.

One such instance is in John chapter 6. Jesus is in the height of His ministry and we read that large crowds were following Jesus. He was very popular. He was working miracles. He was providing food from just five loaves of bread and a few fish, and a lot of people were in the crowd following Jesus. But Jesus, in verse 2, realizes why they were

coming. In verse 2 it just says they were coming “because of the miracles.” The main reason the crowds were showing up was because of the spectacle. They didn’t care as much about the teaching, about the life changing lesson. They were there for the show.

So, why are you here? What is your “because”? Is it because you like the free food? Is it because you really like the music? Is it because you like the chit-chat and your kids can make friends easier than at school? Is it because this church is close to your home? Is that why you’re here? I mean, that’s great for a while, but at some point let’s define the relationship. Why are you here? In that passage Jesus challenges the fans to a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him, and in verse 66 here is what we read:

“From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

(John 6:66)

A lot of them went home because Jesus says, “Let’s define what we’ve got here,” and what He offered isn’t what they wanted. And it may be time for some people just to go home, because you’ve come for a while and you understand things and yet you’re coming in more for the miracles, more for the show, more for what Jesus can do for you. And He wants there to be a point where you define the relationship. Why are you here? Because ...? For Jesus, his because is that He wants to have a deep relationship with you.

The second question we need to ask ourselves is:

2. Are You All In?

You see, being a follower of Jesus requires complete commitment. A follower of Jesus will do whatever it takes to follow Jesus. They’re absolutely loyal, completely committed.

On the whole, we don’t do too well with absolute commitment, do we? I think that we prefer selective commitment. Simply put, we customize Christianity. Oftentimes, we look at our relationship with Jesus and say, “I’m going to follow Jesus, but I’m going to kind of pick and choose the areas in which I will follow Him.” So you say, “Well, I’ll follow Jesus, but don’t ask me to forgive the person that hurt me. I’m not going to let go of that resentment. I’m not going to let go of that bitterness. I deserve that.” Or, “I’ll follow Jesus, but don’t talk to me about my money. I work hard for that money.” “I’ll follow Jesus but

don't tell me to abstain from these sexual desires. I can't help the fact that I have these desires. Don't ask me to abstain. I'm a follower of Jesus, but that won't stop me from getting what I want." So it's this customized Christianity that says, "Well, I follow Jesus, but only in the areas that are comfortable, only in the areas that I agree with. I'm a Christian but I'm not all in."

You see, Jesus wants us to hold on to him. He wants us to follow closely in his footsteps. If you want to be a disciple of Christ, you've got to make sure you follow him alone. So let me ask you one other question to help you define the relationship you have with Jesus: Is Jesus one of many, or is He your one and only?

You see, fans want to make Jesus one of many. And Jesus is clear that this isn't an option. Jesus says the most important command is to love the lord with ALL your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your mind, and ALL your strength. That's the kind of relationship he wants to have with you.

Let's imagine, and this is strictly pretend, that this week you walk into a restaurant and you see me sitting at a table having a candlelight dinner with a woman who is not my wife. You come up and ask me who the woman is and what I am doing. I say that I'm on a date and you say "What about your wife?" I respond by saying, "Oh, well I still love her too. This isn't our date night, our date night is on Thursday, I can date who I want the rest of the week." You would walk away angry and disgusted. You decide that someone needs to tell my wife and so you call her and tell her. Well imagine that I come home from my date and you have already told my wife and she meets me at the door and says, "Hi honey, did you have a nice time on your date?"

Imagine how absurd that would be. You don't even have to know my wife to know that her reaction would be jealous anger – and the Bible describes God as a jealous God. He doesn't want our one-day-a-week affection. He wants your whole heart, 24/7. Jesus explains that following him is not something you do part-time or half-way. Jesus says, it's all or nothing.

I read the story of this young man who dedicated himself to following the upside-down way of Jesus a few years ago. Like some of us, his before and after story is pretty

dramatic. A relationship with Jesus has changed everything for him. Before following Jesus his life consisted of going out, drinking, smoking pot and chasing girls. He'd show up to work with a hangover more often than not. He was full of anger and didn't know why. He felt like he was running in circles with no purpose. And was just kind of going through life aimlessly. But Jesus has brought a radical change in his life. You spend a few minutes with him and it's easy to see the joy that he has found in Christ. He is constantly at church, serving whatever way he can. He's a single dad with plenty of financial struggles – but when he became a Christian he decided that he would no longer work during church times, even though he needed the hours and he would tithe even though things were tight. Then he asked his pastor if he could meet his mom and his pastor agreed.

They sat down for coffee in the nearby café. The pastor knew the mother went to a different church in town and he assumed that she wanted to meet with him at least in part to compliment the church for the difference that she had seen in her son. But that wasn't the case. She was upset with the pastor and the church, because in her words, "my son has taken all of this too far." She was not pleased with how much time he was spending at the church...and how he always wanted to pray when they had family meals...and how he was always trying to tell them about the sermon...and she was upset that he was giving some of his hard-earned money.

And here's what she said to the pastor, "Can you please tell him that the Bible teaches 'everything in moderation'?" And she continues, "He's taken this too far and he needs to understand that it doesn't have to be all or nothing."

This woman, however long she may have been a Christian or going to church for that matter, has got it all wrong. There is no moderation when it comes to Christ, it's all or nothing. We cannot be lukewarm about Christ, we cannot sit on the fence, it's either we're with him or we're not with him. It's Christ or nothing, Amen?

When you decide to become a follower of Christ, you've got to go all in. And fans, they don't like the idea of going all in. They're not wild about having to make sacrifices, or about having to deny themselves of something they desire or crave.

But if you've answered why you're here, then it will be pretty easy to figure out if you're all in. If you weren't here for the right reasons, chances are you won't be willing to go all in.

So, in defining our relationship to Jesus, we've asked:

1. Why Are You Here?
2. Are You All In?

And thirdly,

3. Have You Made It Your Own?

Many of us started going to church because of a parent. Mom made you. Dad said you had to. There wasn't an option. Or maybe you started coming because of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a spouse. You come because they like it when you come. You come because it appeases them.

For those of us who grew up in the church, or who attend church in order to appease a significant other or relative, it can be really easy to become a fan. It's like riding the car with someone who listens to a type of music you're impartial to. They drive you to school or work every day, and every morning it's The Beatles. You don't really care that much about The Beatles. You don't hate them, you don't really like them, but it's fine to listen to. But eventually, a few songs grow on you a little bit. You can't help but hum along to "She loves you yeah, yeah, yeah." So you might say you became a fan of The Beatles.

That can happen to us in church. We keep coming to appease someone else, and pretty soon we get into the flow of things. We know most of the songs, and we even recognize the stories or the teachings, and we're kind of fans of Jesus. But that can be the most dangerous situation to be in. If your faith isn't your own, if you aren't pursuing a relationship with Jesus, and you keep coming week after week and begin to create a "faith" that was someone else's in the first place, you're just numbing yourself to the real thing. You'll become numb to real faith, comfortable with a few songs and a few favorite verses, none of which requires any sacrifice or personal change.

You have to make your faith your own. Jesus isn't looking for a relationship

between you, your mom, and Him. He's not looking for a relationship between you, your wife, and Him. He's looking for a relationship with you.

That may be one of the reasons Jesus said these words in Luke 14:26, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."* This is not about your mom or dad. This is about you and Jesus.

Last Friday, millions of people watched the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump. Some were at the Capitol, some were at home. Many of them were protesters, but many of them were also either fans or followers. But I won't talk about the fans and followers of President Trump. I want to talk about at least four people in the crowd who I believe were neither fans or followers of President Trump. They were there because they were invited. And they took that opportunity to talk about and broadcast to the world who they really are the followers of. I'm talking about the four people who said prayers during the inauguration. These people said their prayers in the name of Jesus. They were not ashamed neither scared to be identified with Jesus. In a highly liberal and secular society where saying the name of Jesus is anathema, these people proudly uttered the name of Jesus. And Franklin Graham, the son of the beloved evangelist Billy Graham, even took it a step further when he explicitly declared that Jesus is the only mediator between a holy God and sinful man, the one and only Savior of mankind.

Folks, a follower of Jesus is someone who is all in. A follower of Jesus is someone who is not ashamed of Jesus. Especially when the heat is on.

So begin to search your heart these next few weeks as we ask, "Are you a follower of Jesus, or are you a just a fan?"

Prayer:

Father,