

Come, Follow

Matthew 4:12-23

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In this time between Christmas and Easter, our regular Scripture lessons focus on different aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. We are trying to learn about what Jesus actually did, what it meant to the people who were there, and how we can apply those lessons to our own lives.

This passage is a great example of that. This is right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry – right after His baptism and the temptation in the desert – and right here at the beginning we see that this was not going to be any ordinary story. As Matthew organizes this story, Jesus has yet to perform a single miracle or eat dinner with a single tax collector or do any of the things we associate with His ministry and He has already seen His messenger arrested and He has left town Himself.

We are going to focus on the part of this passage that starts at verse 18, telling the story of Jesus calling His first disciples. And like the other stories in the Gospels, we are invited to put ourselves into this story. What would we have done if we had been there? What can we learn about Jesus and His ministry from this story? Some of the lessons to be learned and applied seem obvious when we list them, but let's go through a few of them anyway. I've picked out four.

1. The fact that Jesus was calling disciples at all shows that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was never meant to be a one-man show. While this point will become even more obvious in the ministry of Christ and the spread of the Gospel after the Resurrection, right here at the beginning, we find Jesus enlisting workers. Much of the remainder of His ministry would be devoted to training them and preparing them to carry on His mission after He was no longer physically present with them.

No ministry or work of the Church after that was ever intended to be a one-person show either. Christianity was always intended to be lived out in community. God created and empowered the Church to be that community, and meant for that community to be the means for the advancement of God's kingdom in this world, in the here and

now. God populates that community with believers who are joined together to do that work. All believers have gifts to be used in that work, and all believers have a purpose in that work. Jesus called people to work with Him then, and He still calls us to work with Him.

2. Jesus called ordinary people to follow Him. Jesus did not go to the Temple to recruit the high priest or to the synagogues to get teachers of the Law. As those people would later prove, they were not open to the Gospel, and were not particularly interested in being followers. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were regular working men, with no obvious qualifications to be working with the Son of God. Yet Jesus took them right off the shore or right off the boat. Jesus didn't ask to see a resume, or even conduct an interview. He didn't have to, because He already knew them better than they knew themselves. What He saw in them was undoubtedly deep and complex, but we can see one thing very clearly: they were open and responsive to God's call. There was no negotiating here. Jesus said, "Come, follow me", and they dropped what they were doing and followed Him.

If we are ever doubtful about our qualifications to serve God or the Church or each other, we need to remember these guys and the other disciples. They were regular, ordinary people. What distinguished them was not their qualifications. There were no great Scripture scholars or theologians or even especially virtuous people here. No, what distinguished them was their openness to hear Jesus call their names and their responsiveness to His voice.

That is exactly the same thing that should distinguish us. We don't need a degree from Harvard in ancient Greek to be able to study the Bible or even to lead Bible study. We don't need years of training in speech or communications to be able to tell our own story of the love and grace of God. We don't need to be master carpenters to build ramps or help a child build a bird house. We don't need to be graduate agronomists to help plant a garden. We don't need degrees in psychology or social work to just sit and talk to people. All these are examples of things that God can call us to in His kingdom, and we could go on and on with that list. The disciples themselves are a small part of a long list

we could make from Scripture and Christian history and our own personal experience of God using ordinary people to do both ordinary and extraordinary things in His name. None of these people were called by God because they had somehow earned the privilege of being used by Him. We are not called because we have earned that privilege either. We are often called in spite of what we see as our lack of qualifications. Think about the example of Moses. He was called out of the desert to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the people of Israel from slavery. Not request politely, no suggest it might be a good idea, not ask for Pharaoh's indulgence – demand their release. Moses objected, saying he was no good as a public speaker, so God provided one for him in the person of his brother Aaron. That's a great demonstration of a fundamental truth about God's call to His people: God doesn't call the qualified – He qualifies those who He calls. If we are like Andrew and Peter and James and John and are open and responsive, God will qualify us, too.

3. Jesus called these people to work. Those of us who like to fish read this thing about fishing for men and think “Yeah, that's for me.” I'll readily confess to having a rod and reel handy just about all the time, though I rarely make the time to use them. But going fishing just doesn't sound like work to me. I'm with the bumper stickers that say “Work is for people who don't know how to fish” or “Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll be gone all weekend” or “The worst day fishing is better than the best day at the office” or “My wife says if I go fishing one more time, she's gonna leave me. Gosh, I'm gonna miss her.” No, I'm not that bad, yet, but I have no problem relaxing for a few hours on a boat.

But when Andrew and Peter and James and John heard “you will be fishers of men”, it would have been understandable if they had said, “No, thank you. We've had all we can stand of fishing.” Fishing for those guys was work. They had these big nets with weights all around that they cast out from the shore or over the side of the boat. Then they had to haul it in by hand. If there were fish in it, they had to get them to market quickly or else smoke or salt them – no freezers or refrigerators in Galilee. If there were no fish in the net, they started over and over and over. The nets had to be maintained and

so did the boats. This was a risky and sometimes dangerous way to make a living. This was real work, and a day doing just about anything else would be better than fishing. Imagine Zebedee's reaction when his sons left him on the boat with all the work. Probably not a happy guy.

So these guys understood clearly that Jesus was not calling them to a recreational outing. Fishing for men would include proper care of the fish they caught, continuous effort to catch more, being prepared all the time to go out, and facing danger in the process. In Luke's telling of this story, Jesus tells the disciples that they will not just be fishers of men – they will be catching them, assuring them of even greater responsibility for the catch. But the call of Jesus was not to be resisted once they heard it. They were open and responsive, even with this idea of more fishing in front of them.

God's call to discipleship to us is likewise not a call to a life of comfort and ease. It is most definitely a call to a life of joy and peace, but real discipleship requires effort and intention and focus. Churches are full of people who mistakenly believe they are on a boat of discipleship, with their one line dropped over the side, just relaxed and waiting for a bite. That's not discipleship and it is not what Jesus is talking about when He calls every one of us to be fishers of men. If we don't think discipleship is work, we are not getting what discipleship really means.

4. Finally, the call to discipleship is to everybody. I know that Jesus initially called only the Twelve to be disciples. There were many others who followed and believed, but these Twelve were to be the core, the foundation. And it was them, minus Judas, that Jesus came to after the Resurrection to deliver the great commission to “make disciples of all nations.” Not some nations, not some people – ALL. The disciples were just the beginning. In the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, they were changed and empowered to echo Christ's call to discipleship to everybody, and that all echoes today.

Our response to that call to discipleship should be the same as the response of Andrew and Peter and James and John. Their world was turned upside down when they

heard and responded to Jesus. All their priorities and plans and thoughts were transformed by their understanding of three words: “Come, follow me.”

- Each of them heard the voice of the Son of God and recognized His authority.
- Each of them understood implicitly that discipleship would require them to become new people, with whole new priorities and a whole new way of relating to God and relating to the world.
- Each of them understood that there was only one correct response to “Come, follow me”, and that was to follow and become disciples.

We may think that we want God to turn our lives around. But what happens when we just turn around? We go right back through the same path we have already walked. God doesn't call us just to turn around. God wants to turn our lives upside down, inside out, broken apart and remade, transformed.

Jesus speaks to each one of us with that same authority, with the same definition of discipleship, and He longs for us to give Him the same response. I don't know everything that discipleship means for you; I'm still learning what it means for me. But God knows, and He is ready to reveal it to you and transform you into that true disciple, starting from the moment you hear God say “Come, follow me” and you put down your old self and follow Him. Will you hear Him? Will you follow? Will you be transformed?

[PRAYER: That we are listening, hearing, responding]