

## And So It Begins...

Matthew 4:12-23

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany

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West Union, IA

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### Gospel Reading

Our gospel reading this morning is Matthew, chapter 4, verses 12 through 23. Returning to Matthew's gospel, we hear the story of Jesus calling his first disciples; the first followers of Jesus. In a sense, this is the beginning of the church, and these four men are the first Christians.

Most people consider the Day of Pentecost to be the birth of the church, but it could be argued that, the calling of the first disciples by Jesus; when Jesus says, "follow me" is the beginning of the Jesus movement, the Christian Church. Listen to this reading from Matthew chapter 4, and hear the call to follow Jesus:

<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.

<sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup> "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- <sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

<sup>18</sup> As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

<sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## Sermon

In his gospel story, Matthew makes an abrupt transition from Jesus being tempted in the wilderness to the beginning of Jesus ministry. In one verse Jesus, after thwarting the devil's attempts to lead him astray, is being waited on by angels, and in the next verse John is getting arrested and Jesus is moving to Capernaum and beginning his public ministry. We can probably assume that some time passed between the tempting, which followed immediately after John baptized Jesus, and John being arrested, but how much we do not know. It could have been days, or weeks, or even years. But in Matthew and Mark, John's arrest causes Jesus to move to Galilee; to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And that is where we find Jesus, walking along the lakeshore.

I know you have heard this story before, most of you have heard it many times. Jesus out for a walk along the beach, encounters two brothers, calls them to follow him, and they do. Then the whole process is repeated farther down the shore on another pair of brothers. No doubt this is an important story. Matthew takes the story from Mark and repeats it, with only a few minor changes. But what can we learn from hearing this story once more? This morning, I would like to look at the call itself, and the reaction it creates.

The call of Jesus in our reading is boiled down to the bare essentials. It couldn't be simpler; Jesus said, "follow me," and the men responded immediately and completely. But there are several things we can say about the call. First, the call of Jesus is intrusive. Simon, Andrew, James and John are busy men. Two are wading in the water fishing, and two are taking care of the basic tools of their profession. It is not like these four men had nothing better to do; they were not idle; they were not unemployed; they were not looking for a change in life. They were professionals, earning a living and providing for their families. The call of Jesus intruded in on their lives and on what they were actively doing.

The call of Jesus is powerful. With the sound of his voice and the simple words "follow me," Jesus brought about immediate and total response from the men. Any indication that these four men had encountered Jesus before that morning is missing in Matthew. As far as we know, they were total strangers. Jesus has just begun his ministry; no miracles had been performed. With the voice of God that spoke creation into being Jesus calls the men, and they respond immediately and totally. Dropping everything; literally dropping their nets, they turned their back on any fish they might have caught, their profession, their future, and their families.

The call of Jesus is specific. I think we can assume that there were others fishing on the shore that day. The Sea of Galilee was after all the only viable body of water for fishing in the area. Certainly, in the case of James and John, their father Zebedee was working with them, but Jesus called just the four men. We can assume that Jesus saw others fishing that day, and that others saw Jesus walking along the beach; maybe even heard him speak to the men, but Jesus' call was not a broad invitation to everyone on the shore. Jesus spoke directly to the four men, Jesus somehow chose the four men over any others at the shore that day, and said to them, and to no others, "follow me," and only the four responded to his call.

The call of Jesus is particular. The New Revised Standard Version is different than previous versions of the text. In our reading Jesus speaks to Simon and Andrew saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." You may be more familiar with, "fishers of men." The Greek literally says, "I will make you fishermen of men." If Jesus had encountered farmers, he might have called them to be growers of the gospel. Or if he had been calling carpenters, maybe builders of the kingdom. The call of Simon, Andrew, James and John was particular to who they were.

And finally, the call of Jesus is life changing. Another reason I like the older translations, "I will make you fishers of men", or fishers of people, is that Jesus is calling the men to be something new; to change them from fishermen to fishers of people. At this point Jesus is not calling the men to do something, "fish for people." Jesus is calling the men to follow him and become something different; to make a life change. The call to action will come much later after the men have followed Jesus, have learned from Jesus, and have witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In Matthew chapter 28, the very last verses of the gospel Jesus will command them:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

But now, at the beginning of the story, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee the men are called to follow, and to become something new. Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And the two sets of bothers immediately answer the intrusive, powerful, specific, particular, life changing call of Jesus by leaving their nets, their boat and father, and follow him.

Of course, you know that I would get around to talking about our call to faith, our call to Jesus, and our call to the church. This call story of Matthew, and the

similar story in Mark, tell us that we are called by Jesus. We may like to think that we make the choices in our life, but we are called by Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, we are called to follow Jesus. We may not think of it in the same terms and the same way as the call of the first disciples, but our call can be just as intrusive and just as powerful. If you don't think so, maybe it is time to think about how you are called.

I assure you that your call to Jesus was as specific to you as if Jesus walked up to you and spoke your name. Your call is particular to each and every one of you. As each and every one of us is unique in our own way, God is using each and every one of us uniquely, and God is calling us to particular service in the world and in the church. And the call of Jesus is for us to be something new, Christian. We are called to follow, and learn, and witness what the Son of God has done, and is doing in the world. And, we are commanded to go into the world: uniquely called and equipped to be followers and doers of God's work.

In a few minutes we will install the class of elders for the next three years. In so doing we are asking them to use their call and their charge to lead this congregation as so many of you have before and will again in the future. But two of them, Randy Ruroden and Kyle Brandt will also be ordained. They will be ordained into the particular service of Ruling Elders in the Presbyterian Church. In this ordination we are recognizing the call on their lives by God. God's call to use their gifts. God's call to lead this church and the greater church as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. This ordination does not bestow particular powers or gifts, it merely recognizes the call and gifts that God has given them.

Let us pray:

Calling God, you have called us all to follow your Son, Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have reached into our lives and changed us to suit your needs and your church. You have made us in your image, and equipped us to serve you in the world. Called and equipped, send us out into the world to do your will, and spread the gospel of your Son.

AMEN.