

“A Career Change” · Psalm 27; Matthew 4:12-25, 9:9
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After his baptism¹ Jesus ventures into the wilderness where, in the midst of throwing rocks at trees, our Lord fasts for forty days and nights before being confronted by the tempter.² The two stand toe-to-toe, the tempter doing their very best to lure God’s Son into acting in a manner outside of the characteristics of the reign of God. This great supernatural battle is eventually resolved when Jesus, rooted in his belovedness, denies the tempter any satisfaction and they scurry off into the scrub-brush, forked-tail between their legs.

Jesus, once hungry and thirsty, has been waited on by angels³ to the point where he can function again and it is now that he hears that John the baptizer has been arrested; the absence of the Baptizer calls for the presence of the Christ. The time has come when Jesus must go forth to inaugurate the reign of God in the world and so he heads north from the wilderness, through his home town of Nazareth, eventually taking up residence in the town of Capernaum on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Capernaum is at the northern edge of Palestine in the district of Galilee, a border region on the margins filled with marginalized folks who feel they aren’t good enough, wealthy enough, or even ‘pure’ enough to live in or near Jerusalem. This densely populated region was a ‘melting pot’ of sorts where “where Judaism touches paganism, where the nation intersects the nations, where light meets darkness”⁴ writes professor Frederick Dale Bruner. Here in the outskirts where most dare not go – *this* is where Jesus lives and works – and it is here that Jesus advocates a message for the people in his neighborhood: Jews and Greeks, Romans and Egyptians, Syrians and Cappadocians, immigrants and migrants, foreigners and nationals, they all live and work here in Capernaum and they all are in the vision of Christ and the new kingdom.

As Jesus settles into this new land here on the northern edge of Judea he gets to work speaking with authority of the coming days in the reign of this new kingdom and he preaches a new message to the people: “*Turn around!*” he says, “*Turn around because here comes the*

¹ Matthew 3

² Matthew 4:1-11

³ Matthew 4:11

⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: W.M. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 136.

*kingdom of the heavens – here comes the reign of God here on earth, today!”*⁵ This message is one of hope and promise, of love and compassion; Jesus’ message is one of long tables and loving gazes, of reconciliation and forgiveness, of peace which passes all understanding. Jesus’ message calls people in, invites the hesitant to participate, and seeks the world’s rejected – his message turns the world’s norms upside-down and inside-out.

And Jesus walks along the seashore, the breeze off the waters cool against his skin, dark from time spent under the wilderness sun. He moves casually along the beach and spots two men – brothers Simon and Andrew – just off-shore, casting their nets into the lake. And Jesus speaks to them, offering them a new career in the same field. And Jesus speaks to them, calling them to join him as they are – not as they should be. And Jesus speaks to them, inviting them to walk with him. “Follow me,” Jesus says, “Walk with me and I will mold you and make you into one who fishes for people.”⁶ Not knowing what they would do next nor knowing where they would end up that night, Simon and Andrew toss their nets aside and walk with this stranger.

And a little further down the beach this newly-formed trio comes upon two other brothers – James and John – mending their nets in the family boat with their father Zebedee. Jesus calls upon these two men as well, offering them a new career in the same field. And Jesus calls them to join him as they are – not as they should be. And Jesus speaks to them, inviting them to walk with him. Just as with Simon and Andrew, these two brothers – James and John – toss aside their nets and walk with this stranger. Our translations say “they left the boat and their father”⁷ but that’s not nearly as dramatic as the Greek relates which translates into something more like: “they abandoned the boat and their father and all the commitments they had together” and the brothers walked with Jesus down the road.

This chance encounter of meeting Jesus on the shore that day changed the lives of so many people and I wonder: when Jesus calls us, do we respond as fervently, as swiftly, as reliably as these strangers? These men may have heard of Jesus who had been in the area performing miracles and who was occasionally teaching in the synagogue, but the crazy thing is that when Jesus called them they had *zero* hesitation about following – they simply tossed aside their nets and went after the One who had called them. They couldn’t check up on Jesus’ social

⁵ Matthew 4:17

⁶ Matthew 4:19, my translation

⁷ Matthew 4:22

media accounts to see if he was verified, to see if he was for real, to see how many followers he had – no – these men merely heard the voice of Jesus say to them: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”⁸ and they went after him! They tossed aside all their nets, they abandoned their father and their work, they put away all they had planned and could do nothing but go towards the call of Christ.

While I will most certainly give these fishermen credit in that they *may* have heard Jesus preaching and teaching in the synagogue or in the streets, I must also acknowledge that, at best, they’d only heard of Jesus through rumors and gossip. And so this stranger – or, near-stranger – who comes strolling along the beach and invites these four men to walk with him, to learn from him, to trust in his message and believe in their Spirit-given power. Jesus doesn’t give a PowerPoint presentation, no flyers, no sit-down interviews – Matthew doesn’t even mention that Jesus stopped to talk with these fishermen, “As he walked...he said to them, ‘Follow me...’”⁹ And they did! “Immediately!” says Matthew, “Immediately they left their nets and followed him!” No questions, no interviews – they just up and go after Jesus and wherever he’s going they are going there as well. Not just once – this doesn’t just happen once – this happens twice here in chapter four and once in chapter nine, and we can extrapolate that it happened at least seven more times for all twelve disciples: Follow me. Drop it all. Walk down the road with me.

What about us? What about those of us who have been in church for a year, or two, or ten, or seventy? When Jesus calls on us do we drop our nets and follow after him as freely and willingly as these fishermen do? When Jesus invites us to walk with him, to go do new-kingdom things, are you and I ready and willing to step out of the safety of our boats and get to work?

I know that far-too-often when I hear Jesus’ voice I reply by shuffling my feet and wringing my hands as I mutter to the heavens: “I’m not good enough! I’m not smart enough for that! I’m not worthy of doing that.” How often do we who know the risen Lord...we who know the one who knows us best...how often do we deny his call for us to follow him?

I think we deny the call of Jesus because we feel like he’s not going to speak in ways we can understand – we’ve all read parts of this book and, at times, felt utterly confused by what Jesus is saying and who’s to say he won’t be just as muddled and unclear now as he was then?

⁸ Matthew 4:19

⁹ Matthew 4:18-19

And so we push aside the call of Christ until you and I feel like we're speaking the same language and have the same understanding as Christ.

I think we deny the call of Jesus because we feel like we're ill-equipped and we're not ready to do this work – we can't possibly be smart enough or brave enough or worthy enough to be an ambassador for God! And so we push aside the call of Christ until you and I feel like we're 'enough' to participate in the reign of Christ.

I think we deny the call of Jesus because we are comfortable where we're at and we enjoy this space that we have so diligently worked to attain. After years of hard work and sacrifice we are finally in a good home with a good bed and we have healthy food and clean water – why would we ever want to leave this? And so we push aside the call of Christ because we would much prefer Jesus to sit down here with us and teach us instead of going out there.

The beauty of Jesus' call for Simon, Andrew, James, John, Matthew and all of the other disciples is this: Jesus speaks to them and teaches them in ways they can understand. Jesus doesn't call these fishermen to be cowboys for Christ or artists for the Almighty – he calls them, saying: "Walk with me and I will mold you and make you into one who fishes for people." The beauty of Jesus' call is that he speaks to us and teaches us and calls us in ways we can understand and if we don't get it, he keeps at it until we do grasp it.

The beauty of Jesus' call for his disciples is this: he invites them to join as they were, not as they should be. Jesus doesn't call these disciples and he doesn't give them a whole list of prerequisites they need before they can follow, and Jesus doesn't tell them they needed to be sin-free, and Jesus doesn't tell them they need to have all their ducks in a row. No, Jesus looks at the marginalized of the world and calls them to join just as they are. The beauty of Jesus' call is that he invites us to participate in the reign of God as we are, not as we should be – he invites us to be molded and made as we go, not denying us access until we are 'enough'.

The beauty of Jesus' call for his disciples is this: he invites them to walk with him as they learn. Jesus doesn't sit down in a classroom and talk about all the different scenarios these disciples may encounter and what to do in certain situations. No, Jesus' lessons are experienced in the life of the community in the world around him. The beauty of Jesus' call is that we are asked to participate in the reign of God here and now, and we are to act as ambassadors this very day – Jesus invites us to learn from him as we walk with him. Jesus wants us out in the world doing things and learning as we go, making mistakes and learning from them.

Friends, Jesus calls each of us to walk with him, to be molded and made into the people he intends us to be. Jesus calls each of us, speaking to us and teaching us in ways we can understand. Jesus calls each of us and invites us to participate in the reign of God as we are – not as we should be. Jesus calls each of us and encourages us to be disciples here and now, learning as we teach, confessing when we fail, forgiving as we have been forgiven.

Jesus' closest companions and his first disciples weren't learned rabbis, they weren't the wealthy elite, they weren't the ones worthy of this calling. The first ministers weren't dressed right, they didn't fit into cultural norms, and they didn't submit to unjust authority. The first ministers weren't chosen because they were smarter or nicer than anyone else; no, they were chosen because of their willingness to say yes to Jesus' yes to them. "Follow me," says Jesus, "and I will mold you and make you" and these folks did just that, trusting that this man would be enough. What about you? Jesus is calling this very day: "Follow me and I will make you..." Do you hear his voice? Do you trust his promise? Do you believe in him – not in yourself – but do you believe in him and the good news that he has for you and your neighbors?

Jesus is calling this very day to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger. Jesus is calling this very day to clothe the naked, to visit the imprisoned, to share *his* love with the world. Jesus is calling this very day for you and I to follow him and be made into disciples...he's calling...he's calling...