

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
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."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

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 lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 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. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

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.

Just as you are
Matthew 4: 12-23

As James the Son of Zebedee:

"John the baptizer is in prison! The one who was preaching about repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the one who was asking us to turn around, to change directions, to prepare for the One who was coming who was greater than he, is now in prison! Why? We had such hope for a moment that things might be different. And what about the One who was to come? Where did he get off to? There were some in our village who were on the river that day when he was baptized and heard God's voice saying this was his son and we should listen to him but even he disappeared and hasn't been seen or heard for over 40 days or so.

So what were we to do but go back to our nets, back to what we know how to do? Back to the regular ordinary routines of our lives! What were we thinking; that things might be different? Better? That we might not have to toil so hard to eke out a living? So, let's get back to whatever we were doing before and don't get our hopes up. This is just how life is; a daily struggle to get by with a few fish, hard work, lots of taxes, and an oppressive Roman government. And where did that Jesus fellow get off to anyway?

We grew up fishing. All of us really; my father and his father before him and we do it because we need to survive. I had dreams of doing something else with my life. A merchant maybe or even a rabbi's student. I don't know. Sometimes you do what you must and there are days when I don't see much of a future for myself or my brothers. What difference will my life make anyway? I don't know how to do anything but catch fish. I can't read or write. And yes, I'm pretty good at getting the best price for the fish, but I don't see what difference that makes. I will end up just like my father who is already old before his time and I know he had hoped for

something better for us all. We live in a dark and dreary world with no end in sight; with always the dream of a Messiah who would set things right.

But then we began to hear rumors about another prophet who was preaching in the area. He was preaching about repentance for the forgiveness of sins just like John, about heaven and God. And so my brothers and friends went to see what they could find out.

Much to our surprise it was Jesus the Galilean who had come to make his home in Capernaum. He stood along the river and the hills and spoke the same message we heard that John had been speaking. And yet, with Jesus there was more. He spoke about relationship with God, his father. About helping the poor and oppressed, about bringing light into a dark world, about serving others in the name of God, our faithful God. About restoration and renewal!

He spoke of God's redeeming love and care for those who were poor and lonely and searching for meaning in their lives. He spoke with passion and anger about those who oppressed us and God's love for other people outside our culture. He left us wondering if our lives could be different if we would only believe and follow the Way that God had intended us to follow. He planted a seed within me that began to take root and grow and make me think things about God that I never knew were in me.

And then it happened. One day as we were mending the nets and getting ready to work he was standing right in front of me. I couldn't see him at first because the sun was in my eyes but I felt his shadow fall on me and then I heard his voice as he said "Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men and women. I will help you and you will help me become fishers of people and we will bring about the kingdom of God. What do you say?"

I have to tell you, in that moment, it was as if a light had come on inside my spirit. I knew then that this was what was missing in my life. That I had been called to follow this One who had come to bring peace and equality to our world. I looked back to my father who was already in the boat. We held each other's gaze and in his face I could see that he would grieve the loss of me, but he wanted me to go. To make a new life, a life of meaning and purpose that only God can give us and to follow this One who has come to bring light into the world. It was with sadness and excitement that I dropped my nets where they were and followed Jesus. Who knows what would happen next...."

There has been a quote making its way around the internet by Mark Twain and it goes like this: "***The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.***" I can't help but imagine that this was true for those first disciples on that fateful day.

There is so much in this story that captures my imagination and I hope it does yours as well. It should remind us all of our own first encounters with Jesus, and I invite you to take a moment and remember what that was like. Perhaps it is similar to these brothers this morning where you dropped everything to follow Jesus. Or maybe it was more like Paul's experience where there was a sudden and life changing moment, and then time to reflect and discern. Or perhaps it was simply a kind word or action that awakened you to your deepest need and longing. All our experiences are different I think, but in the same way they are similar, in that God is at work in them all. Always moving ahead and preparing the soil of our hearts and spirits.

There is something about this story that is so typical of how God works in that God seems to enjoy choosing those who are the least prepared, the least powerful, the least educated; those with the lowest social and political power, to be his companions and leaders in the Kingdom. Isn't that the funniest thing in the world? That he calls us right where we are with whatever gifts we have, to participate in the kingdom of love. I have some

personal experience with this and maybe you do too. But I confess I don't always say yes or follow the way these first disciples did. I can certainly recount many times that I have been called to follow God's call in my life but usually found myself saying, "Hang on! Hold the Phone! Uh...maybe we should rethink this? And then I would say no!" I didn't feel like I was good enough to be a disciple. I wasn't smart enough or holy enough or faithful enough. I get discouraged. I get angry. I think un-pure thoughts and don't love my neighbor like I should, and I yell at their dog, a lot! I'm not perfect enough to follow but thanks for asking!

Maybe you feel the same way? Maybe you don't think that what you do in the world matters because you aren't holy enough or smart enough or know the bible enough. That you have shortcomings as a person and especially as a Christian? But if we look honestly at the way God works in the world it becomes pretty clear that you and I are exactly who God is interested in, and typically calls us ordinary flawed people to do his will and work in the world. Hysterical, isn't it?

David Lose put it this way: "Jesus called ordinary people right in the middle of their ordinary lives to do extraordinary things...and he still does." In our reformed tradition, we call this the *priesthood of all believers*. That the place you find yourself is very likely the very place that you are called to serve. That we are all of us ministers wherever we find ourselves, and that no matter how we feel about our qualifications for that particular role, God sees us differently and says, "Follow me, I have something for you to do."

I came across a wonderful hymn text which reminds me of this. The hymn is called "***Lord God, Your Love Has Called Us Here***" the text really spoke to me and I hope it will for you too. (can be sung to the tune, *Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to me*)

***Lord God, your love has called us here, as we, by love, for love were made;
Your living likeness still we bear, though marred, dishonored, disobeyed;
We come, with all our heart and mind, your call to hear, your love to find.***

***We come with self inflicted pains of broken trust and chosen wrong,
Half free, half bound by inner chains, by social forces swept along,
By powers and systems close confined, yet seeking hope for humankind.***

***Lord God, in Christ you call our name, and then receive us as your own;
Not through some merit, right, or claim, but by your gracious love alone;
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat, and find you kneeling at our feet.***

***Then take the towel, and break the bread, and humble us, and call us friends;
Suffer and serve till all are fed and show how grandly love intends
To work till all creation sings, to fill all worlds, to crown all things.***

***Lord God, in Christ you set us free your life to live, your joy to share;
Give us your spirit's liberty to turn from guilt and dull despair,
And offer all that faith can do, while love is making all things new.***

We are living in a really interesting time in history aren't we? Not only politically, but socially and religiously. There are many in the world clamoring for your allegiance and for your attention. Do this. Think this. Stand with us. Stand with them. Don't stand for anything. And into this world of yours and mine comes Jesus this morning, and every morning and says, "Follow me. Follow me and we will do something amazing in the world.

We will, you and I, show the world that love wins, that love is more powerful than hate, that love is God's siren call to the world to come home, to come and be reconciled at last. Love calls us to remember the 'least of these' and work for justice and peace offering grace and mercy to all.

So what is God calling you to do right now? Who or what is the Holy Spirit placing on your mind and heart to respond to in Love and compassion? What are you going to do about that? How is Jesus saying, "follow me" in your life? How is Jesus saying that for you individually and for us collectively as a congregation right here in Yancey or Mitchell County? And how will we respond? The choice is up to you but I can assure you from my own experience that that call will continue to come back around until you finally drop your nets on the ground and follow.

And here's the good news. God can use whatever gifts you have and doesn't care a bit where you've failed or fallen short. God doesn't care if you feel unqualified or if you are hesitant. God doesn't care if you are young or old as Methuselah. God wants you to listen and respond. ***Jesus call us: o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea; day by day his sweet voice soundeth saying, "Christian, follow me."*** You are the very person that God is looking for today. There's no one better for the job, and if you want it, it's yours. Thanks be to God. Amen!

For those reading the sermon today we will be singing the following hymn and I thought you might like to see the text. It is called ***Will You Come and Follow Me*** page 726 in the Glory to God Hymnal. Written by John Bell.

1 "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown; will you let my name be known;
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"

2 "Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?"

3 "Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?"

4 "Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?"

5 Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.