

Follow Me

Is 9: 1-4, Mt 4: 12-23

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Isaiah 9: 1-4

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Mt 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 sea, 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 sea—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.

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

These words are often attributed to Winston Churchill and are one of my all-time favorite quotes. They speak of a philosophy of life that fits into a bumper sticker yet in practice will fill countless books as they sum up what it truly means to be a person living a life rich with faith, grace, compassion, care, and love.

“We make a living by what we *get*. We make a life by what we *give*.”

To live our lives, we all need money for at least the basic necessities and responsibilities, so we find ways to earn money for ourselves and our families. We make a living from what we earn, from what we get. But that is not enough. What we *give* from what we have is how we make a *life*.

In other words, our vocation, our work, our career, our job, puts food on our tables, a roof over our heads and clothes on our backs as we make a living. Our calling, the work of our faith,

values and ethics, feeds our souls and the bellies of others. Our calling offers a home of welcome and comfort for those in need of tenderness, acceptance and attention. Our calling helps us to share with others in ways as simple as new socks or a backpack filled with school supplies.

We all have those moments, those memories, when we've noticed someone in need of something, and our response was, "Let me give it to them." Remember the smile that your kind act of giving brought on the face of that person to whom you selflessly gave? And the big wave of positive energy that this act evoked inside *you*? Didn't that experience make your day just as much as it made someone else's day?

And just think about it, if you made the practice of giving a way of life, it would make *your* life.

This is the mindset of Jesus' first disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter, who were brothers from a long family line of fishermen, yet also disciples of John the Baptist. They had been baptized by John, had heard his message and testimony about the One who was to come after him, the Messiah. As fishermen, the two brothers were powerless, fairly poor men, looking forward only to a life of daily grind to earn a living under the regime of the Roman Occupation. These fishermen weren't part of the social elite. They weren't the movers and shakers in society who were able to exercise political power or impact their community in any way. Their lives were already scripted until John the Baptist led them to see a world beyond their fishing nets and had introduced the brothers to Jesus with the bold declaration, "Look, here is the Lamb of God."

Now, not all that long after their amazing afternoon together when they had affirmed, "We have found the Messiah," Jesus comes to them with the invitation they have been waiting for, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." They have been called to join him as disciples, as faithful partners and participants in his ministry. They immediately left their nets, boats, and lifestyle behind; trading in their vocation for their calling, as did Zebedee's sons, James and John, who seem to have shared the same life aspirations as they heard of Andrew and Simon Peter's first encounter with Jesus.

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

As good Jews, they would probably have been aware of the Jeremiah 16:16 verse where spiritual fishing meant overcoming God's enemies so that Israel may be restored, "I am now sending for many fishermen, says the LORD."

Perhaps they heard Jesus' invitation in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy and John the Baptist's ministry, as a call to do more with their lives and believed it to be the way out of their poverty and powerlessness. Here was a call to a new life.

There is a new reign of God and it is focused at the center of their everyday human lives. Four fishermen, called from their everyday lives and expectations for something new, called to make more than a living, but rather to be a part of Jesus' ministry that gives life. They will be a part of feeding thousands of hungry people at a single meal, they will witness healings and hope that had just about been abandoned, they will be privileged to see and hear the more intimate moments of Jesus' ministry. Over and over they will bear witness to the Light that shines in the darkness, that breaks the rod of the oppressor and takes on the yoke of another's burden in ways they could have never imagined, and in a direction, they could not expect.

Four fishermen, the first disciples, were just the beginning, as Jesus' invitation is offered to each of us, and each time we hear it, we hear it anew as we are called in ways we may not have imagined, and in a direction, we could not have expected.

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Like the four fishermen, Jesus meets us where we are—where we worship, live, serve, or volunteer; where we work, play or rest, is where Jesus invites us to come and follow him. In the calling to a new life there is also a calling *away from* what has been. Like the first disciples, there has to be an openness to trying new things, to being surprised, to waiting for faith to become the evidence of things not seen. We are called not only to leave behind our gods of prestige or financial abundance, but also our social and political agendas that focus on our own needs and forget those whose shoes we would not choose to wear.

“Follow me,” Jesus beckons. He began his ministry gathering disciples, gathering followers, gathering a community, calling together the Body of Christ. While an individual can believe in God, it is only the community of faith that lives into the reality of the Kingdom of God. For it is how we work together, how we disagree with one another, how we each contribute to the whole that exemplifies discipleship and faith. We need one another, and through Jesus’ calling disciples at the beginning of his ministry, we see that even God cannot do this alone.

Called to be fishers of people, our job is to be those who share the good news of Christ from our own lives, and therefore encourage others to be gathered in by the net of God’s love, to come and be part of the sea that is God’s world. That is the only real way for the church to grow, for the number of those who follow Jesus to increase – because they have been called by him, sometimes in voices that sound very much like ours. We have been called to follow Jesus and invite others on the journey of discipleship.*

Indeed, we spend our days making a living, we spend our lives giving because we have accepted Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Amen.

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