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Follow Me
Matthew 4:12-23

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.
¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*

*¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—*

*¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”*^[1]

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Follow me, and I will make you fish for people

Even people that don't know the Bible know this phrase.

Everyone knows the images that go with it too.

The fishing poles, hooks, anchors, boats...the ictus fish that people stick to the bumpers of their cars....

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

But what does this really *mean*?

What does it mean *to you*?

Does God want us baiting, hooking, and reeling people into the kingdom of God?

People are not fish.

We don't want to 'catch' people against their will for God's kingdom.

But, we ***DO want everyone to know Jesus***—

we do want everyone to ***be a part of God's kingdom***.

So what is Jesus saying?

First, I think we have to remember how ***unusual*** it would have been for a teacher, a Rabbi at that time to come along and say 'follow me' to potential students!

Back then students usually sought out their teachers.

Here the teacher, Jesus, is seeking out his own students, or disciples!

So this would have definitely ***caught people's attention***.

And then what ***he says is so unusual*** too.

I will make you fish for people?

Why would he say that?

Could it be, because these men were ***fishermen***—

And their way of life was to be out on the sea?

So wouldn't it make sense for Jesus to tell them that he would make them ***fish for people?***

But what if they had all been ***doctors?***

He could have told them he would make them healers of souls!

What if they had been ***carpenters?***

They could become builders of the kingdom!

Or if they had been ***weavers***, they could weave people into God's community!

Whatever their calling, whatever their gifts,

What if that's how Jesus would want them to live out their faith?

What if the point is that Jesus is calling them to ***follow*** him, and asking them to ***live out their faith***

in such a way that others come along too?

But to do it with what ***they have***,

with ***what they know***, with ***who they are***.

And what if---what if the ***same thing is true for us*** today?

What if we are called to follow Jesus, and to ***be who we are***---
 To live out our faith in such a way that others come along too
 But with what we ***have***,
 with what we ***know***,
 with who we ***are***.

Let's just imagine that God is calling US to follow Jesus in ways
 that fit who we are.

What if you don't have to become something or someone you aren't,
 in order to follow God?

What if ***you*** are ***already equipped*** to follow Jesus, and to do ministry, today?

What if it's really ***part of who you are as a person, a child of God***,
 And not just something to do?

We sometimes think about people ***being called*** to follow God,
 As if those stories are for someone else.....like priests or something.

But God calls ***every one of us***---Jesus wants EACH of us to follow Him,
 in our ***own way***!

This would mean we are free to be the ***best we can be***,
 to bring our gifts and talents in service of God,
 to use our own skills.

Do you ever look at the back of the bulletin?

It says that the ***ministers here—are all members***.

That's no joke.

We're ALL called, to be ministers—to minister or serve others.

You know what else is in that bulletin?

Something we do at the end of every service.

We ALL take the light of Christ out of this place, and into the world—
 wherever we go!

It ***doesn't matter*** who we are, where we live, what our age,
 What if we have what it takes to follow Jesus, and to minister to other people?
 right ***where*** we are, right ***who*** we are, right ***now***?

Do you remember WHEN these disciples decided to follow Jesus?

Immediately.

Matthew says they left everything and followed him, right then.

Wow. That can sound intimidating.

But what if it ***was more of an excitement?***

Like they heard something they'd been ***waiting to hear their whole lives?***

And, what if Jesus asks us for that kind of ***response*** still today?

That when we hear or feel His nudge, to reach out, serve, help, love,
 that we just do it—we follow it right away!

So often we are ***so busy with our lives***, we don't take time out to listen for
 these little nudges.

Pastors joke that ***ministry happens in the interruptions...***

because you just never know when God will ask you to stop and do something
 you hadn't planned!

It's so, so true—for all of us!

And what if we have ***already have all*** the skills we need to do that?

And what ifas we follow Jesus,

we ***become more and more*** of who we were created to be?

One Methodist Pastor put it this way:

BE who you are.

SEE what you have.

DO what matters.

(congregationaltransformation.com, ctblog; Nov 30, 2009)

What do you think of that?

BE who you are.

SEE what you have.

DO what matters.

At this church, we believe that doing what matters is

following our mission statement: Loving God and Neighbor.

And HOW do we do that?

By taking that ***light of Christ*** from this place into the world!

What does that mean in your life--today?

With who you are, and what you have?

Jesus said, Follow me, and I will make you.....***what will Jesus make YOU?***

And what if, this call to Follow Jesus—

it's ***not just something else we add to our 'to do' list*** in life....

What if Jesus wants to ***use our lives***,

whatever we're ALREADY ***doing***,

wherever we're ALREADY ***going***,

and whoever we ALREADY ***are?***

And in following....***we become even more of who we're meant to be?***

Sometimes following Jesus

Means having a simple conversation,

or offering a friendship,

extending a welcome,

or opening your life for someone else--- In a place and time you already know.

*Is there someone at your **workplace** you've felt a nudge about talking to, or inviting to lunch?*

*Is there someone **in this church** who has been on your heart to reach out to?*

*Are there people in need that you see **on your usual route**,*

to get groceries, go to the doctor, or run errands?

*Is God calling you to **stop and say** something? **Do** something?*

*Have you seen or **heard a story** that touched your heart so deeply—*

*and you know you want to **respond?***

This is how almost all service begins.

People are touched by something—a tragedy, a story, a person, a need, and they respond.

How are you being asked to respond?

How about our church—in 2020?

In 1942, a man named George Maines ran a newspaper article in Flint, Michigan, requesting information about children serving in the armed forces. More than 1,000 mothers responded.

Those moms began what we now know as ***Blue Star Mothers***—moms of service men and women, who support them in dozens of ways today.

A mom named Lisa Bain started a 501c3 in Tulsa called ***Joy in the Cause***—a group that gives all kinds of care packages for people in difficult situations. *Lisa Bain started the nonprofit through the lessons she and her mother learned together through her mother's cancer journey and her own diagnosis of two life changing autoimmune diseases. Those lessons taught Lisa how joy changes things and makes room for hope and healing. She found that laughter really is the best medicine and that miracles can definitely be found in very dark places.* They have prepared hundreds of backpacks for Tulsa police to give to children in crisis. They have sponsored Pink in the Rink to support cancer survivors and their families. <http://joyinthecause.org/about-joy-in-the-cause/>

I saw a recent evening news segment about a father and 10-year old son who spend every Saturday in Salt Lake City ***looking for a homeless person to take to lunch!*** CBS Evening News, Thursday, January 23rd, 2020.

Jesus might be saying—Follow me---with your gift of ***generosity***
or ***handyman skills***
Your artistic talents,
Or your gift of ***hospitality, compassion, justice, or love.***

Jesus might be saying---***you survived that***---now help others do the same!
You have been ***touched by that tragedy***—how can you be there for others?

How might Jesus be saying to our ***whole church—follow me.***
With who you are, what you have....doing what matters!

Follow me and I will make you...what will Jesus make US?
How will Jesus use FPCO to bring people into the kingdom of God?
How will Jesus use us to ***shine the light of Christ*** in our community,
and our world?

We ALL have the opportunity to follow Jesus,
And ***encourage others to do the same***...in our own ways, in our own lives.

And what if in following Jesus---

We find our joy!

We find fulfillment!

A Christian writer and Pastor, ***Barbara Brown Taylor***, tells in one of her books about a time when she was struggling with her own sense of call. She simply could not figure out what it was that God wanted her to do and be. Did God want her to be a writer? a priest? a social worker? to teach? She simply didn't know. And in her frustration and exasperation, one midnight, she says, she fell down on her knees in prayer and said:

"Okay, God. You need to level with me. What do you want me to be? What do you want me to do? What are you calling me to do?"

She said she felt a very powerful response, God saying,

"Do what pleases you. Belong to me, but do what pleases you."

She said it struck her as very strange that God's call could actually touch that place of her greatest joy, that she could be called to do the thing that pleases her the most.

But really it makes sense.

Following Jesus is about ***finding your joy***.

Thomas Long, "Where You Never Expected to Be", Program #5004, [30 Good Minutes](#), First air date October 22, 2006.

Lutheran Pastor and activist against Hitler,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that 'follow me' is a call to 'absolute discipleship'.

He said that only in surrendering ourselves to this command do we find our ***greatest joy***. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. NY: Touchstone, 1995, pg. 37-38.

Another Christian writer, Frederick ***Buechner*** says, *"Our calling is where our deepest joy, and the world's hunger meet."*

Howard Thurman, an African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader once said,

Don't (just) ask what the world needs.

Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it!

Because what the world needs is people to come alive!

Friends—following Jesus,
Taking the light of Christ into the world,
It's all about
Finding joy---and Coming Alive!

Follow me, and I will make you.....what will Jesus make US?

Friends, hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel today:
Jesus is calling us to Follow---
whoever we are, right where we are,
with whatever we have to offer.
And He will ***make us more*** than we ever dreamed possible,
and help us find our joy.

And for that Good news, all God's people say, Amen!