

Sermon for January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Vicar Lucas Cochran

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:12-23

*<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.*

Last week we heard from Pastor Tim a sermon on the calling of the first disciples, and today we heard that same story from the perspective of Matthew and the two stories are told a little differently, one where Peter is brought to Christ by a family member and the disciples come to Christ seeking him out. But in our story this week the perspective is flipped, and Christ comes to his disciples in their world, at their place of business and calls them to be his disciples.

Before getting too deep into that though I would like everyone to take a minute to close their eyes and visualize the word painting I will attempt to construct for you.

Imagine being in a small village, living along the water, the natural profession for someone living in such a location would most likely be a fisherman of some kind. Your parents were fishermen, their parents were fishermen, and now you are a fisherman, and your sons who you have raised up and taught the family business are now also fishermen. You know your lot in life, you are content working the craft your family has spent generations perfecting, you teach it to your children so that

they can learn about and help with the family business so that eventually they can take it over from you just as you did from your parents, and they did from theirs.

Now imagine that same scenario and at your place of business in the middle of the workday that will most likely be very similar to every other day prior, a man comes to your job site and tells your children who are also your employees to leave with him and do something else entirely. And not only do they listen to this guy, but your children actually leave with him, without even a second thought as to what it would do to your business and the lives of your other family members you need to support.

Open your eyes. Now hopefully we all understand what it was like for the father of James and John who was out fishing with his sons that day. It must have been a very shocking experience to see your sons who you need to run the business and one day take over from you so that your family could survive, just one day up and leave without so much as giving a two weeks' notice. How would you think that looked to their father to watch his sons abandon their family's livelihood? After all, that was a big reason why you would have children then, to continue the work that was needed to support your family after you were too old to do it yourself. Family was the only safety net you got and Zebedee the father of James and John just lost his safety net in an instant.

Sometimes that's what it looks like to be called to do something by God. In this specific situation Christ calls his disciples to come with him and become fishermen of people, and to have their nets be made out of the Word instead of thread, and their waters will now be the people of God instead of the Sea of Galilee.

This bold move from the disciples to leave their lives behind on what must have seemed like a whim to Zebedee and follow this guy on the shore who was calling to them, that to me sounds like the modern equivalent of starting a business out of your garage. But the disciples hear Christ's call and immediately drop what they were doing to follow the Lord.

Now not all call stories are like this, not everyone who hears a call to ministry to preach the word of God has the strength, courage, or opportunity to drop everything and follow their call.

Not everyone hears a call for ministry either, some hear a call to do something else but still hesitate for years to pull the trigger on what they feel they are supposed to be doing, or just never get the opportunity because other pieces of life get in the way. But everyone has heard the call at one point or another, that voice that says "you feel as if God is guiding you in a specific moment, to do a specific thing," and we hope that when that call comes whether it is to preach the word of God to the masses, as with the disciples in our Gospel reading, or to do something else entirely no one's call story is the same, in fact very few people can do what the disciples did

and immediately leave all of their responsibilities behind to follow a man they had never seen before that day.

As I'm sure Pastor Tim could tell you, as I'm sure every candidate for ministry there has ever been can tell you, the number one question you get asked all the time is, "What is your call story?" An explanation of why you decided to go into ministry, why you decided to become a deacon or pastor. And it's always followed by other questions from family and friends, questions like, "Do you make a lot of money as a Pastor, what can you do or not do, are you able to do this or that, can you preside at a friend's wedding, are you able to drink now that you are a pastor?" And it seems that everyone is more interested in the consequences of this calling rather than taking the easier path with better financial opportunity, or better job growth and security. Instead of focusing on the call itself and how we felt a need from the Spirit to spread the word of God in the most literal sense, from behind the pulpit.

Through seminary and my education career learning what it means to be a minister of the word and sacrament, I can tell you that no one's story, not one of them was the same, every one of them was unique and their own. Some people went into ministry straight out of college, some waited until after their kids were in college, and others still waited until they were already on their third or fourth career before taking that first brave step onto the path of ministry. And I promise you not one of them was like the story we heard today, not one of them dropped everything immediately to follow that calling to the office of word and sacrament or to the office of word and service.

Now when I was still a mailman if Christ himself appeared before me and told me to follow him, I would hope that I would first be able to recognize who he was, and maybe I would have been able to drop the mailbag on the street and follow him right then and there. But as far as I know and from all the call stories, I have heard not one of them had Christ appearing before them. That might be the difference needed to make someone drop everything on the spot, like it was for the disciples. But for myself and others I know our call to ministry was a discernment process, a dedication of time and energy before we all concluded that going to seminary and being a candidate for ministry, that was the path that the Spirit was calling us to take.

Answering your call is hard, but I will tell you that all of us are called to be disciples of God, all of us are disciples of the church here to help spread the word. It's just that not all of our discipleships look the same, just as all of our call stories are not the same. Not everyone is called to be behind the pulpit like your pastor is, but all of us are called to spread the word of God. You could be called to be a teacher, a doctor, a soldier, an architect or one of another million things we can do

in this world, but no matter where we are in this life we are all called to help God in the mission to spread the word and message, “that the kingdom of God is here now”.

I started off this sermon with asking everyone to visualize the perspective of Zebedee the father of James and John. I did this because when I read this passage over again earlier this week, I couldn't help but think to myself “Man, this story sounds nice from the perspective of the disciples, showing how strong their faith was in the Lord to drop everything immediately and follow him.” But I also thought Zebedee must have had a look of shock and surprise on his face seeing his sons abandon their way of life and everything he had taught them, to do something else.

And I kept thinking that must have really sucked for their father Zebedee. But then I thought of it a little bit further and asked myself, why wasn't Zebedee called to follow Christ in the most literal sense like his sons were? After all he was in the boat too, and many hands make quick work or so they say. The guy that taught his sons everything they knew; he must be of some usefulness if not the equal amount of usefulness that James and John were.

Was he too old, did he lack something that his sons didn't? Sadly, that is not explained, but then I did what I asked all of you to do this morning at the beginning of this sermon, I put myself in Zebedee's shoes and played out what I thought would happen next if the story followed Zebedee and not Christ. And I thought the first thing I would do in Zebedee's shoes is complain about what just happened to me, to my wife, to my friends and family. I would gossip till my heart gave out that a mysterious man came to the river and told my sons to follow him, and they did without a second thought.

People then might want to know more information about my story, they might want to know more about my children's motivations or go to the river themselves to look for James and John and this mysterious man who is making them fishermen of people. What a strange story it must have been, and others would probably want to know more. Zebedee was not called to physically follow Christ but he was probably carrying out God's mission in the world whether he was aware of it or not, by telling the story, of what he had seen and heard, he was spreading the word to all his fellow fishermen.

Christ called the disciples to follow him directly and literally, but Zebedee was still most likely taking part in the work of spreading Christ's message. After all we might not see it in our reading this week or in our reading next week, but the verses at the end of Matthew chapter four describe the masses coming from all over to follow Christ, and that message must have spread somehow. And it makes sense that people like Zebedee and in similar situations would have been telling others the

story of everything that happened to them. And humans being the curious creatures they are came to investigate and see for themselves this man called Jesus.

Not all of us are called to follow Christ in the most literal and physical sense, not all of our call stories are the same, not all of us are called to stand behind the literal pulpit and preach the word. But all of us are called to be disciples; all of us are called to help the word spread. We can hear the call to do a number of literal physical things in the world like being an artist or an author or a mechanic instead of standing behind the pulpit and preaching. But once more no matter where we are called to be in this life, we are called to be disciples, to spread God's word to those who are in need of it.

God calls us to spread the word and to put ourselves behind a pulpit. Not always a physical one like this one and sometimes we might not even be aware we stepped up to that metaphorical pulpit until we are already standing there, but rather that pulpit is where ever we are, ready for us to stand behind it and show the world a message of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and to spread God's message of the kingdom of heaven having come, and that it is here for all of us, given as a gift through our savior Jesus Christ.

So, do not think that to spread the word of God you have to be up here in robes and a belt behind the literal pulpit, or that Christ has to appear before all of us and directly tell us that our time has come to become his disciples. Whether that call comes to us at our job site like with the disciples, or while we are relaxing with a good book in the park. The opportunity to spread the word is always there because we are all called to be disciples of Christ, we all can spread the word of God no matter our profession, our gender, our economic status, our age, or any other imaginary boundary we create for ourselves. All of us can hear the call and can further God's mission in the world, whether it's to share the word with the masses or one individual, we are all spreading the word of God as disciples. Amen.