

Follow Me
Matthew 4:18-25
Week 10

Opening Prayer

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Gracious God, as we come together to place our lives in front of your Holy Word, we pray that you would give us wisdom and understanding. May we approach this sacred text with humility, curiosity, expectancy and love. Be among us and in our conversation through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of the one to whom this whole story points, Jesus the Christ, amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Each week, give an opportunity for folks to either respond to the check-in question below or, if they'd rather, share something that came up for them as they were reading the other texts assigned for the Big Read this week.

Name an author, celebrity, musician, politician etc. that you follow on a regular basis. Perhaps not officially on social media, but is there a name that comes to mind when you think of folks who work and life you keep up with (i.e. their newest book, album or article)? What about that person is attractive/ why do you follow him/her?

Background

With the exception of a brief mention of the calling of Matthew the tax collector (Matt. 9:9), these two adjoining stories describing the calling of four of Jesus' disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John – are the only accounts in the Gospel of Matthew that describe how Jesus acquired his twelve disciples. The names of the other disciples simply appear, somewhat abruptly, in Matthew 10:1-4. This narrative of the calling of the four fishermen, then, is no doubt intended to be a representative story, bringing into the light the basic dynamics of the calling of all the disciples.

As Matthew presents what happened by the Sea of Galilee, three factors are highlighted. First, he emphasizes the **family relationships** of the people involved. Peter and Andrew are specified as brothers, as are James and John. Indeed, Matthew is so eager to underscore the brotherly relationship of Peter and Andrew, he mentions it twice in the same sentence; and he does the same for James and John! That Zebedee is the father of James and John is similarly underscored.

Second, Matthew emphasizes the **disciples' occupation**, stressing the fact that all of these people were fishermen. We find them in action doing their jobs – sailing in a boat, mending nets, and casting nets.

Third, Matthew emphasizes the **swiftness of their reaction** to Jesus. In the case of each pair of brothers, the response to Jesus is immediate. Instantly they left their nets; they left their boat; they left their father; and they followed Jesus.

Taken as a whole, these stories of the calling of the disciples make it clear that Jesus summons people from the fabric of family relationships – brother, sister, daughter, son, father, mother – and from the midst of the workaday world – fishing, teaching, clerking, cooking, building – into a new set of relationships and to a new vocation.

Does this mean that Jesus calls into question our family ties and creates conflict with our occupations? In a sense, yes. The kingdom of heaven doesn't exist to serve the family; the family exists to serve the kingdom of heaven. The goal of the kingdom is not to serve us in being more effective and productive in our jobs. Our work is truly effective when it serves to express the will of God. The patterns of our lives are not made secure by the kingdom of heaven; the kingdom of heaven rearranges them into the new design of God's own making.

In these stories of the calling of the disciples, Jesus disrupts family structures and disturbs patterns of working and living. He does so, however, not to destroy but to renew. Peter and Andrew do not cease being brothers; they are now brothers who do the will of God (Matt 12:50). James and John do not cease being sons; they are now not only the children of Zebedee but the children of God. All four of these disciples leave their fishing nets, but they do not stop fishing. They are now, in the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, fishers for people. Their past has not been obliterated; it has been transformed by Jesus' call to follow.¹

Who are the disciples?

Jesus promised to expand his kingdom through people (18-22). Jesus the Messiah could have done the work of the kingdom all by himself, for there is nothing he can't do. But Jesus did not do the work alone. He called people to help him, to be a part of his kingdom work. He called normal people like you and me.

¹ Long, Thomas G. *Matthew*. Westminster Bible Companion. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY. 1997.

They didn't have a college degree; they were working men. Jesus didn't choose highly educated men to change the world. He chose hard-working men who could listen and watch, learn and obey.

Most likely this was not the first time that Jesus met them. Surely they had heard Jesus' preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." What is surprising however, is their willingness and readiness to follow Jesus. Jesus simply said, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people," and they followed him at once. Jesus gave them a command and a promise. The command was, "Come, follow me." The original Greek actually says, "Come, behind me," or "Come, after me." It meant, "Come with me, right now."²

3 Part Discipleship

- 1) **Follow me.** While we might follow artists on Spotify and YouTubers and cultural celebrities on social media, Jesus was the original One that people followed. This part is the command. Jesus certainly offers this to all people, but we must be clear that it is a command. And commands require some form of obedience. To come after Jesus, to live our lives in the manner he would live them, means that we've chosen to submit to him. And it implies that up until the point that we follow him, we have been following other things—most likely we've been following ourselves.

Discipleship begins with God's call, and our response in repentance as we acknowledge our sin, turn from it, and also realize for the first time that we are the ones Jesus has invited to be part of the kingdom. But "follow me" is also about a relational change, too. For the early church, to admit that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God meant being ostracized socially. It meant turning their backs on their friends and social networks. A Jewish person now was kicked out of the synagogue. A Gentile person no longer offered sacrifices to Caesar or other pagan gods and goddesses. The beginning of discipleship, then, is about submitting to Jesus and about your relationship with God's people. They are now your new family.

- 2) **And I will make you.** Those who follow Jesus do not get to remain the same. Matthew quit defrauding people as a tax collector. James and John stopped vying for the best position in the kingdom. Paul quit persecuting the church. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit invite us into relationship with them, and as they do, we find that we are changed, conformed, into the image of Christ. Spiritual formation is the lifelong process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. God changes us from the inside out, creating clean hearts where ours were unclean, enabling us to love God with all our hearts. It is also about your relationship with the Triune God. 1 John 4:15-16 says, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." Jesus invites us

² *Jesus Says "Come, Follow Me"*.

<https://ubf.org/resourcedetail/18094?source=HQ%20Education%20Study%20Team&bcode=140>. 24 April 2017.

to become like Him—we are invited into fellowship the Trinity has always had with itself, the love God has for Himself, and as we enter in, we are changed into people who are able to love God and neighbor. This is where the third aspect of discipleship comes into play.

- 3) **Fishers of people.** Our discipleship is not for us. **The church is the only institution in the world that exists for those who are not yet a part of it.** As we walk with Jesus, we are called to share him with others in word and deed, and to take an active role in their discipleship. Fishing is a metaphor, obviously, for seeking men and women who will also follow Jesus. To be a fisherman takes more than luck, more than sitting around waiting, more than hoping the fish will come to you. It takes understanding when to fish, where fish will likely be, and what kind of bait they like. Fishing for people, without sounding too crude, takes the same things. We are called to be in the world but not of it, fully aware of what is happening in the world around us, fully engaged in the lives of our neighbors.³

Teaching, Preaching, and Healing

Verse 23 is an introduction to the rest of Matthew's gospel. Jesus' ministry was a mixture of teaching, preaching and healing. Teaching and preaching are both word ministries. They require ears to hear. Teaching and preaching are similar but slightly different. Teaching is instructing to form or change the mind of the listener, or student. Preaching is a proclamation or declaration of a truth to impact the heart and will of a person. Healing included the physical healing from diseases as well as the spiritual deliverance from demons. Jesus' ministry was holistic, since it was intended to reach every part of a person: their mind, heart, body and soul. When Jesus has all of us then we are truly his disciples. When Jesus has all of us, his Holy Spirit works in us to sanctify us and through us to bless and help and impact others' lives.⁴

Read Matthew 4:18-25

Initial Reactions

1. What from this story confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

³ Matthew 4 and the Call to Discipleship. <https://bmmchurch.org/blog/matthew-419-and-the-call-to-discipleship/>. 5 February 2021.

⁴ *Jesus Says "Come, Follow Me"*.

<https://ubf.org/resourcedetail/18094?source=HQ%20Education%20Study%20Team&bcode=140>. 24 April 2017.

Going Deeper

4. Read Matt. 28:18-20. How does Jesus' first command to His followers found here in Matt. 4:19 compare to His final command in the Great Commission? In these two commands, what is Jesus saying about our purpose in life?
5. Jesus not only calls but he casts a vision, he tells them what they will become.
 - a. What does he tell them that they will become? Why do you think he might have used this imagery?
6. Jesus did not share with these new disciples his "gameplan". They were following with trust.
 - a. Is it helpful sometimes to know where God is headed? Will we always know? How does knowing (or not) effect our ability/willingness to follow?
7. Consider that Jesus extended this call to these regular guys while they were on their jobs. It was an ordinary day in their lives that became extraordinary.
 - a. What does it mean that God operates in ordinary, everyday moments? Can we miss God in the "ordinary?" Do you look for God in your day?
8. What did Jesus do throughout Galilee (23)? What does this show about the kingdom? How did people respond to Jesus' ministry (24-25)? Why do you think large crowds followed him? Why do you follow him?

So What Questions

9. Verse 22 says that James and John left their boat "immediately" or "at once" after Jesus called them.

How often do we respond "immediately" or "at once" do a direction that we receive from the Lord? What stops us from responding immediately?
10. Peter and Andrew were casting their nets when Jesus called them, Jesus interrupted them. But they didn't say, "Well Jesus, that's not what we were planning to do" or "Give us a minute to finish fishing". They arose and followed.

Do the plans you make for your life and the life of your family include Jesus or give room for Jesus to make some changes?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.