

January 22 2017

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

Isaiah 9:1-4

Matthew 4:12-23

Sermon *Come, Follow Me*

Do you remember the childhood game of Follow the Leader? Someone was the leader and all the followers did whatever the leader was doing and went wherever the leader went. It was fun most of the time, unless the leader did something you couldn't do or the game went on forever and became boring. As a child, I was small and not very coordinated. Now I am not so small but still am not very coordinated. I am one of those, can't walk and chew gum at the same time kind of people. So Follow the Leader could be a challenge for me. I imagine I never made it to the end of the game. So if someone walked up to me and said, come, follow me, it would bring back the memories from my childhood and I would most likely be inclined to say no thanks. I have played that game before and it wasn't that good of an experience. How would you respond? What would your answer be if you knew it was Jesus who asked you to follow him, would that make a difference in how you responded?

Let's look at this question another way. Do you like to fish? Would you do it as your primary source of income? What comes to mind is the show "Deadliest Catch." If it was anything like that show I know I wouldn't/couldn't do that as my primary source of income. Suppose however, that you are a fisherman and you are getting ready to go out for the day to hopefully have a good day of fishing and someone walks up to you and says. Come, follow me and I will show you how to fish for men. Would you drop your nets and follow him?

What inspired Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing to go with Jesus? We have no clues from the Bible why they did go with Jesus. So we can only wonder why they did.

Were they having a bad day of fishing? We have all had bad days at work; maybe on this day the nets kept coming up empty, maybe the net-mending was especially tedious and monotonous, maybe the heat and humidity were all but unbearable.

Were James and John desperate to get away from their father? Maybe old Zebedee was a tyrant, constantly belittling his sons, telling them they were lazy and stupid. Maybe when Jesus gave his invitation, they jumped at the chance to leave their dysfunctional family.

Were they looking for a good excuse to stop being fishermen? Maybe they figured fishing was a dead-end job with little chance for advancement, so they had all gone down to the community college and taken a seminar how to change careers, and Jesus came along at just the right time. Had the four fishermen heard reports about Jesus, about His powerful preaching? Maybe they had even heard Him themselves, and the thought of knowing Him, being one of His disciples, was irresistible. Did the words, "I will show you how to fish for people," sound intriguing? Maybe they wanted to find out what He meant by that strange expression. Maybe it held just the right combination of novelty and intensity to pull them away from their nets, their boat, and fall in behind Him. Why did Andrew and Peter, why did John and James, follow Jesus that day? Did they have any idea that following Him would mean a radical change in their lives? Maybe they thought "follow me" simply meant "you deserve a break today." Maybe they figured they deserved a holiday and tomorrow they would be back to fishing again. Surely they couldn't have guessed what lay ahead for them- the excitement, the fun, the grief, and the joy of it.

Bottom line is that we simply don't know why the fishermen followed Jesus. The gospels don't tell us. All Matthew's gospel says about Peter and Andrew is this: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." All Matthew's gospel say about James and John is this: "Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." I am sure the boat didn't care that they left, but what about the father? Imagine for a moment what a reporter's interview with Zebedee might have sounded like.

"So, Zebedee, what did you think when your sons walked off the job that day?" "I was furious. 'Hey', I yelled at them when they took off after him. 'Hey, we're not even halfway through mending these nets. Where do you think you're going? Do you think I can do all this work myself?' Oh, I cursed and fussed, all right. We fishermen are known for our colorful language, you know." "Did you have any idea your sons would never come back?" "Of course not. If I'd known that, I'd have run after them and dragged them back to the boat. I still can't believe it really happened. I thought I'd done a good job of raising them, of teaching them what it means to be responsible, to honor their parents and to live up to their family obligations. But it's plain that I failed. I mean, what kind of men would just walk out on their job, their families? I was counting on my sons to carry on the fishing when I get too old. What will happen to me and my wife?"

"What's your opinion of the teacher from Nazareth?" "Humph. I've heard He left his father's carpenter shop the same way my boys left my fishing boat. I guess that fits. This Jesus obviously wants as His followers, irresponsible, spoiled brats who just up and take off, with no idea about what they are getting into."

This is all speculation because what Zebedee really thought about his sons' going with Jesus doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible. But this imaginary interview with Zebedee does raise some provocative issues. Following Jesus always means leaving something behind. And sometimes our friends, our families, will have a hard time approving of or even understanding our decision. To follow Jesus also means that we cannot predict what that decision will lead to. Would the four fishermen have followed Jesus if they had known all that lay ahead? Maybe, maybe not. The point is that they didn't and couldn't know, anymore that you and I can know all that following Jesus will mean for us. There is always risk involved.

Is Jesus calling you? Now you may say, hold it, I've been baptized. I've been a member of the church for a long time. What do you mean, is Jesus calling me?

It means that His call comes not just once in your life, but many times. There are calls to a vocation, or to change vocations. There are calls to a particular place, to a specific faith community. There are calls to a task and there are calls to stop what you are doing and find refreshment for your tired spirit. There are calls into and out of relationships. There are calls to regret what you have done, to repent and make amends for your wrongdoing. And there are calls to stop regretting, to accept the fact that you are forgiven and get on with your life.

Is Jesus calling you? Sometimes the call of Jesus is loud and clear as a fire siren. Sometimes, many times, His call is more like a still, small voice. But we are not meant to hear the call all by ourselves. It is a part of God's plan "to incorporate us as one body, so that our ears have other ears, other eyes, minds, hearts and voices to help us interpret what we have heard. Together we can hear our calls, and together we can answer them, if only we will listen for the voice that continues to speak to us in the language of our lives." This quote was by Barbara Brown Taylor, from the *Preaching Life*, Boston.

It was just said that there is always risk involved in answering the call of Jesus to follow Him. We cannot know where the call to follow will take us. But ours is not the only risk. Jesus also took a risk on the disciples. For reasons, known only to heaven, God is constantly taking risks on all kinds of people- people who fish for a living, people who are too young to have jobs, people who have retired. Every day God takes risks on the human race, takes risks on people like you and me.

One thing the Bible makes clear about the call of Christ is that the One who calls us is the same One who gives us the strength, the resources, to follow. Maybe, after all, that was the decisive factor for the four fishermen who left their nets and their boats to follow Jesus. Maybe they sensed at some deep, unconscious level, that here was Someone who could be trusted; Someone who, if he asked much, could give even more. That same Someone is He who when he invites you

to his table to offer the resources that are a bit of what is baked in an oven and a thimbleful of what has been squeezed from the grapes, is offering nothing less than His body and blood, the very things we need to sustain us as we answer His call to follow.

Jesus is calling you. How will you answer? Amen.

A part of this sermon was one given by Kenneth L. Gibble on May 1, 1998.