

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the
Gentiles—

16 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.”

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

18 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. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 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. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23 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.

RECALLED

I know what the letter looks like. I opened it with an air of resignation. Toyota is recalling my truck.

It seems that closing the little door in the back too forcefully might make the seat belts come loose. That would not be a good thing should there be an accident.

So, Toyota tells me that if I bring my truck in they will check and see if my screws are loose. If they are, they will fix it. And the fix will only take two hours!

Good thing they have free popcorn.

I hate recalls. But, they are necessary. I would rather a car company admit that they have made a mistake. If they didn't, down the road the consequences for some of us could be tragic.

And that brings me to our lesson for today. We know that Jesus calls us.

But, does Jesus recall us. Does Jesus bring us back into the shop to tighten some loose screws? Does Jesus restore the joy of our salvation?

What do you think? Do you think that Jesus not only calls us but also recalls us from time to time?

REPENT

I think Jesus does recall us. All of us are faulty in some way, and from time to time we need to have our lives reconditioned.

When John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus took up the mantle and the message of his cousin. Notice that Jesus' message is identical to John's message: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17; cf. 3:2) And so the call (and the recall) of Jesus is dependent upon repentance.

So, what does it mean to repent?

Most people would say that it means to feel sorry for what we have done wrong. And that's partially true. It does mean to feel sorry for the mistakes we have made.

But, it also means feeling sorry enough for those mistakes that we actually turn around and go in a different direction. Repent means to do something about what is wrong instead of just agonizing about it.

To repent means to change. To repent means to respond to the recall letter with action.

If the screws are loose they need to be tightened. If the design is flawed it needs to be fixed.

And if our life is a mess it needs to be cleaned up.

But, that can't happen unless we know that there's a problem.

If Toyota didn't send me a letter telling me that my screws might be loose I wouldn't have known to go get them tightened. And if God didn't send us Jesus, the light of the world we wouldn't have known that we were in the dark.

So repentance at its heart is changing our mind, changing our perspective on things. It is the Spirit of God helping us to see that the kingdom of heaven is near. It is the Spirit of God helping us to see the light even though the world we live in is dark and dingy.

Repentance is one of those "aha" moments that turns everything upside down. And the calling of the disciples illustrates just how dramatic that moment can be when Jesus appears.

IMMEDIATELY

In the first scene, Jesus goes for a stroll one evening by the Sea of Galilee. He sees two brothers, Peter and Andrew casting a net into the sea. Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Peter and Andrew are called to leave their old job. But, they are not called to go on unemployment. They are given a new job. They are called to "fish for people." This will be their new life's work.

Matthew's choice of words suggests that their call was sudden and perhaps unexpected. We read, "*Immediately* they left their nets and followed him." And so, without comment or question, Peter and Andrew follow Jesus.

In the second scene Jesus sees another set of brothers. James and John are in a boat with their father, Zebedee mending their nets.

Jesus calls James and John. And the response is the same. “*Immediately* they left the boat and their father, and followed him.” Jesus’ call not only takes priority over job; Jesus call also takes priority over family.

Many of us find this to be disturbing. Its one thing to leave your job for Jesus, but its quite another to leave your family.

This was especially disturbing in the ancient world. Family was very important in those days. Family connections were a primary source of identity and honor.

The responsibility to care for family was rooted not only in cultural custom but also in biblical law. Honor your father and mother was a basic commandment that could not be ignored.

But, when Jesus called, James and John left their father in the boat alone and followed Jesus.

The call stories in Matthew are sparse in detail. We would like to know more. Like Paul Harvey we would like to know the rest of the story.

Did the disciples know Jesus before they were called? Had they been thinking about following Jesus for a long time? We don’t know.

But, maybe we want to know more (or even make up more) because the story as it’s written makes us uncomfortable.

I’ve noticed over the years that quite a few people react negatively to the call stories of the Bible. They say, “Surely there was more to it than that. Surely they didn’t just leave their jobs and their families to follow Jesus. That doesn’t make sense.”

But, the more I read the call stories in the Bible the more I think that’s exactly what happened. There is a sense of urgency to the call of those first disciples.

The word Matthew uses to express this urgency is that word we often associate with the Gospel of Mark, the word “immediately.”

Immediately the disciples left everything that they knew and loved and followed Jesus.

Later in Matthew's gospel we learn that this was indeed the case. Peter speaking for the disciples says to Jesus (perhaps with a bit of regret and fear), "Look, we have left everything and followed you." (Matthew 19:27)

SAFETY VERSUS THE LEAP OF FAITH

I've noticed that Christians today are often reluctant to do that, to take a leap of faith, to do something impulsive in order to follow Jesus. We do not want to "immediately" leave everything and follow Jesus.

We want to follow Jesus when it suits our schedule.

And there is always something else that seems to take precedence over following Jesus.

Instead of a spontaneous, sacrificial faith, we want a faith that will help us manage and control the life we already have. We want safety first, last and always. Some of the modern incarnations of the Christian faith, particularly the prosperity "gospel" provide for that need.

Unfortunately, following Jesus is not about doing things the safe way. Following Jesus is not about getting rich. If we're going to be disciples of Jesus, we are going to follow the one who tells his disciples to take up a cross and follow him.

If we're going to follow Jesus, we're going to have to accept the idea that control is an illusion. This is going to be a wild ride.

We're going to run into situations that will scare us to death or worse. Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart.

Maybe that's why Matthew tells the story the way he tells it. Following Jesus does require a leap of faith.

When Jesus comes near, things have to change. We have to change. That's what it means to repent.

Jesus called his disciples to a radical new way of life. It meant getting on the road with Jesus not really knowing where that road would lead. It meant selling everything in order to obtain the pearl of great price.

This story is not an isolated story. It is a theme that runs throughout all the gospels. Jesus always goes ahead of us leading us into places we would rather not go and encouraging us to do things that we rather not do.

FAILURE AND RECALL

For these first disciples following Jesus would prove to be difficult indeed. Despite their initial obedience to Jesus' call, in the coming days, the screws will come loose, and a recall will be necessary.

The disciples will fail to understand and obey Jesus. They will sleep through his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

They will run away when Jesus is arrested.

And one of these first disciples will even deny that even knew Jesus.

Jesus will be crucified, and the disciples will remain in hiding.

But, the God who called these disciples will not be defeated even by death and betrayal. Jesus' message will reach the disciples through the testimony of the women, who visit the tomb,

"He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." (Matthew 28:7)

The disciples were called in Galilee, and now the risen Christ has them return to Galilee. In Galilee Jesus will come to them again.

There in that place where they were first called they will be recalled.

In Galilee of the Gentiles they will be restored, and they will truly learn to fish for people instead of just for fish.

The disciples ran away from Jesus, but Jesus did not run away from them.

The disciples failed Jesus, but Jesus gave them another chance to follow and another and another.

The Savior who first called them continued to call them, inviting them to trust not in what they could do but in what God would do through them.

Jesus called them and recalled them.

And Jesus does the same in our lives as well.
Each day provides an opportunity to follow the call of Jesus anew.

NO BACK SEAT FOLLOWERS

Author Erik Larson is a popular author now, but it took a while for his popularity to be established. He told of how after he wrote his first book that his publicist set up a book tour of major cities.

In one venue he walked into the auditorium and took his place at the podium up front. As he peered out into the huge room he saw that there was only one person present.

He smiled at the woman in the back row and said, "It's good to see you this evening. Why don't you move up closer to the front?"

She replied, "No, I'll stay put. I might want to leave early."

That woman represents for me how many of us view Christianity. We are not so sure that we want to follow Jesus. So we listen from a distance, always ready to move away if we don't like what they hear.

But, that's not how following Jesus works.

Jesus' disciples didn't get to sit on the back row and leave early. They either followed him or not. They either had a front row seat with the fearless teacher and healer or they were not considered disciples.

There was no middle ground. It was all or nothing.

And the same is true for us. We can't take a seat in the back row in case we want to leave early. We are either all in or all out. We either follow Jesus or not. We either commit ourselves to the risky ministry of teaching and healing in the name of Jesus or we don't.

ORDINARY FISHERMEN

You may think that the call of Jesus is only for special people.

We know that ministers and missionaries hear the call of Jesus, but what about ordinary workaday people? Does Jesus call them?

Maybe ordinary people don't have time for the call of Jesus. Maybe Jesus only calls special people with special skills.

We may think that, but our thinking doesn't square with the teaching of Scripture.

Did you notice the people that Jesus called?

He didn't call rabbis, trained in the interpretation of Scripture. He didn't call priests and theologians.

Jesus called fishermen. Jesus called ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

And I believe He still does.

And the thing that Jesus called his disciples to do was to be "fishers of people".

What did that mean? It meant that they would be evangelists for the kingdom, telling the Good News about the work of God in Christ.

But, it also says something about how they would do that work. They would proclaim the Good News face to face.

It would be a matter of personal relationships. It would be a matter of feeding the sheep, caring for people one person at a time, one relationship at a time.

It would be a matter of bearing each other's burdens and caring for each other. It would be a matter of holding on to each other through thick and thin. It would mean making the promise of God's abundant grace a reality.

This was and is a big job.

But, God had a plan. God would call many ordinary people to live Christ shaped lives. And through these common disciples the extraordinary work of God would be accomplished.

Don't think that those first disciples were somehow different from you. They weren't. They were common fishermen who received an uncommon call.

So today as you sit in the back row in the darkened auditorium, the teacher is inviting you to take a seat closer to the front. The right answer is to get up and move forward.

And much to our surprise we might hear ourselves say, "Here I am Lord. Send me."

And he will make us fishers of people too.

Amen.