

## COME, FOLLOW ME

Mark 1:14-20 Text: 17 “*Jesus said, ‘Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’*”

Our lesson this morning begins when Jesus called Peter, James, John, and his brother Andrew to follow Him. It happened right after John the Baptist had been put in prison and Jesus had gone into Galilee to begin His ministry. John was in prison because he had spoken against King Herod’s marriage to Herodias, who just happened to be the wife of his brother Philip. John told Herod it was against the Law for him to have her as his wife since Herodias was his sister-in-law and niece. But they got married anyway, making John’s disapproval of Herod’s marriage to Herodias in direct opposition to Jewish Law. Herod wanted to kill John for that! But Herod was afraid John’s influence over the people would hurt him.

Now, back to Jesus who was walking beside the Sea of Galilee when He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a fishing net into the lake. By trade, they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out, “*Come, follow Me. I will make you fishers of men.*” They didn’t have to think about it, because all at once, they left their nets and followed Jesus. And “*when He had gone on a little farther, He saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat, repairing their nets. Without delay He called them.*” Again, without thinking about it “*they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Jesus.*” It was by the grace of God they laid down their nets and followed Jesus right after He called them. Because when Jesus said, “*Come, follow me, I will make you fishers of men*” they did!

So, what does it mean to be a “*fisher of men*”? It means placing your feet exactly where Jesus first placed His. Stepping in His footprints. Following His actions. In every situation you face, copying His life into yours. It’s the same for everybody who accepts His invitation and lays down their life to “*follow*” Him. *That’s* when you have become a “*fisher of men.*” It’s why you’re called to *be* a Christian. You’re called to share the love of Christ with others. To be a light shining in the darkness. You’re called to lead others to their eternal salvation.

But much of Christianity today has been reduced to “*Say this prayer. Ask Jesus into your heart. You’ll go to heaven.*” That’s *never* how Jesus invited people to Him. He said, “*follow Me.*” Receiving His salvation means you have deliverance from your sin and its penalties when you put your faith in Christ. You have given Him the Lordship of your whole life. You’ve said you will go where He leads you. And that He’s both your Savior AND your Lord.

On September 22, 1881 a *New York Times* reporter went to the West 30’s in New York City. A police officer was guarding him so he could get details of a multiple murder there. The West 30’s is a neighborhood in mid-Manhattan located between 30th and 39th Streets between Fifth Avenue and the Hudson River. The reporter said that the entire area was “*probably the lowest possible, and filthiest in the city.*” According to him, 39th Street between 9th and 10th Avenues was known as *Hell’s Kitchen*. The name later included all the surrounding streets.

A story credits the name *Hell’s Kitchen* to a German who owned a restaurant in the area known as Heil’s Kitchen. But the most common version of the story is when “*Dutch Fred the Cop*” a veteran police officer, and his rookie partner were watching a small riot on West 39th Street near Tenth Avenue. The rookie was reported to have said, “*This place is hell itself.*” Fred the Cop replied, “*Hell’s a mild place. This place is Hell’s Kitchen.*”

Then, in 1884 a British minister, E. W. Blandly came to the United States with his wife Eliza and became an officer in the Salvation Army. In 1890, he felt *called* to live in that Manhattan slum filled with gangs and low life called “*Hell’s Kitchen.*” He was a writer of hymns. And he wrote several hymns while there. “*Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow*” is one. It’s about following Jesus wherever He leads you. Even if it means going through challenging times. The hymn’s beautiful refrain goes like this - Sing it with me:

*Where He leads me, I will follow,  
Where He leads me, I will follow,  
Where He leads me, I will follow,  
I’ll go with Him, with Him, all the way.*

That hymn should remind you, you’re always to trust Jesus. And to follow Him wherever He leads you. That hymn is a beautiful expression of faith and devotion to God. And there’s no other kind of disciple, or follower, than one who is *sent*. As a *disciple*, Jesus *calls* you. As a *student*, Jesus *teaches* you. When He *calls* you, He *enables* you. And then He *sends* you to *fish for people*.

Acts 1:9-12 tells how Jesus went up into heaven, and that someday He will return. Jesus had appeared to His disciples several times after His crucifixion and resurrection. And it was during one of those appearances before His ascension, He instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, which would later be called Pentecost. After telling them to wait there, He was taken up into the sky. A cloud hid Jesus from their sight. And as the disciples stood there looking up into the sky, two men dressed in white stood beside them and asked why they were looking up into the sky, and then told them, Jesus would return in the same way that He had just left. So, the only reason

Jesus did not take anyone with Him then was, because His mission must be completed by His inspired and Spirit-filled Church before He returns.

Still today, Jesus is *calling*! He *calls* in the same way He *called* Peter, James, John, and Andrew. One way or another, He will show Himself to you. You may not be aware of it. But you may be thinking, “*What am I going to do with my life?*” You may think God is good. That He created order out of a world of chaos. You know the Bible is true. That Jesus is to be trusted. Yet, others have had experiences that led them straight to Jesus. And they’re following Him because He said to them, “*Come, follow Me.*”

In the Middle Ages, clergy were considered a higher status of Christian than being a layperson. Clergy had their own routine of frequent daily worship and prayer that laypersons didn’t have. They had church rules to follow, which laypersons didn’t have. Clergy usually lived in communities — monasteries and convents — unlike laypersons. However, when the Reformation in 16th-century came to Europe it was a major theological movement in Western Christianity. It posed a religious and political challenge to the papacy. And the authority of the Catholic Church. All the distinctions between clergy and laypersons were removed because God *calls everybody*!

The word “*vocation*” is from the Latin word *vocatio*, which means “calling.” Everyone has a *calling*. A position in life. That’s how society functions today. “Vocation” means that every job should try to build up and maintain society as a *calling* — teacher, insurance salesman, car mechanic, politician. Whatever! And there are callings within families — mother, father, aunt, uncle, child, grandfather, grandmother. God can be served in families as a *calling*.

A man was a junior high school teacher. He was active in his church as a boy. Some of his relatives urged him to consider becoming a pastor. He told his own pastor he felt no *calling* to be a pastor. He felt God wanted him to be a schoolteacher. That wise pastor told him to follow his *calling*. That he would be serving God in a school room somewhere, just as well as being a pastor in a church somewhere. That pastor understood what it meant to follow God’s *call* in your vocation.

The Old Testament has a story about a “*calling*.” But it has some strange twists. It even has a whale! Jonah was *called* to deliver a message from God to people Jonah didn’t like. The Ninevites! It was a message he hoped they would not accept. But, after trying unsuccessfully to avoid his *call* and winding up in the belly of a whale, Jonah finally arrived in Nineveh to deliver the shortest sermon ever in the Bible. It was an eight-word threat of God’s destruction. “*Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.*” To his shock, his sermon was successful. The Ninevites believed God. They repented their sins. And when God saw they had turned from their evil ways, He relented. He didn’t bring the destruction on the Ninevites He had threatened. The book of Jonah ends with God making it clear to Jonah that mercy is for *everyone* who repents.

Now, Jonah’s *call* included a message he was to deliver to Nineveh. But in our lesson today, those fishermen were called with no message or instructions, whatsoever. They were *called* to an uncertain future. They would have been scared out of their wits had they known what lay ahead for them. But God’s *call* is always for an uncertain future. When you accept God’s *call*, you have no idea how, or where, you will end up. You choose your career. You take a job. You hope you can use the gifts and talents in your vocation that God has given you. But there are no guarantees in life. Which says, life is unpredictable. You can’t be certain of what will happen in the future. It’s a reminder of your mortality that you should cherish every moment, of every day, and make the most of your time left on this planet. While you can’t control everything that happens to you, you can control how you react. You can choose to be positive. You can choose to learn from your experiences. You can grow as an individual.

So, make the most of your time. Enjoy every moment! And since there are no guarantees in this life, live each day as though it may be your last. Enjoy your life today to the fullest. And plan what you will do *if* you are given another tomorrow. It makes sense because your life is a gift given to you by God. And the best way to show your appreciation is to give it back to Him by following Him wherever He leads you. And how can you know that? There are several signs that can tell you that God is leading you. *Prayer*: Ask God to reveal His will for your life. *Your Circumstances*: Watch for situations to see where God is moving you. *Peace*: If you have peace about your decision, it may be a sign that God is leading you. *Confirmation*: Seek confirmation from others who are spiritually mature, and wise, and who will offer you, their opinion. *Scripture*: Study the Bible to gain insight into God’s will for your life. But remember, God’s will for your life may not always be clear. It may not always be easy to recognize God’s *call*. However, by seeking God through your prayers. Studying His Word, and seeking wise counsel from others, you can trust that He *will* guide you in the right direction. And when you hear Him *calling you*, you should be willing to say, *Lord wherever You lead me, I will follow.*

AMEN