

Disciples Follow Christ By Faith in his Word

Matthew 4:12-23

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” ¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

I. What Kind of Disciples Might Jesus Want?

I’m sure that a good number of you have heard of Secretary Rumsfeld’s famous exchange with the soldier deployed to the Persian Gulf. The soldier asked Mr. Rumsfeld why so many troops had to scrounge around dumps for armor for their vehicles. Mr. Rumsfeld’s response was “You go to war with the army you’ve got, not the army you want or wish you had.”

I wonder if God had the same conversation within Himself: “Why is it we’re looking around for fishermen and tax collectors to be our disciples, instead of the rich and the clever and the powerful. Why pick zealots and revolutionaries instead of Roman Centurions who have power and influence and who can help our message spread even faster? Why do we get Sgt. Clink and Gilligan instead of Captain Kirk or Donald Trump?” Do you think God just sighed and said, “We’ll, we build the Kingdom with the disciples we have, not the disciples we want or wish we had”? I don’t think so. God never does anything “by mistake,” or because his original plan didn’t work out. So why did God choose the disciples he did?

II. What Kind of Disciples Does He Pick, and Why?

I asked a more specific question of the pastors in our Tuesday morning Bible Study. See, it’s easy to say, “Well, God chooses the weak and lowly to shame the strong,” (1 Cor. 1:27) or “God chooses what is not to bring to nothing those things that are” (1 Cor. 1:28). But why choose *fishermen*? You notice that today Jesus specifically picks out 4 fishermen to be his disciples, and it turns out that three of these four will go on to become part of Jesus’ “inner circle.” It’s Peter, James and John that will be on the Mt. of Transfiguration with Jesus in two weeks. It’s Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus on Good Friday. Why pick *fishermen*?

Maybe you’re asking yourself, “Pastor, what difference could it possibly make who he picked? So, he picked fishermen.” But why not pick shepherds? God loves shepherds – David was a shepherd. The angels sang at Christmas to the shepherds. David even called

the Lord his shepherd, who would not leave him wanting (Psalm 23). But if you look at the 12 disciples, there's not a shepherd in the bunch. Why wouldn't Jesus walk through the fields of Galilee and say, "Follow me, and I will make you shepherds of men?"

Or why not vineyard workers? There are vineyards and vineyard workers all throughout the Old Testament. In Isaiah the Lord sings a love song about his vineyard (Isaiah 5). Jesus himself talks about vineyards in many of his parables. Why not walk through the vineyards and say, "Follow me, and I will make you tend vines of men?"

It occurred to me that there's probably a very simple reason Jesus chose fishermen. Shepherds can see their sheep. Their job is all skill. If the sheep are attacked or you lose them, *it's your fault*. The same goes for vineyard workers. If you ruin the vine, it's your fault. Yes, you depend a little on the weather, but mostly it's your skill.

But fishermen work on faith. They toss their nets down into water they can't see into, and hope they'll bring up fish. Sure, they depend a little on their skill and on experience. They know where fish *should* be. They know where they *might not* be. But mostly, they work on faith that the fish WILL BE THERE.

ILLUS: Bridge vs. Crazy Eights. It's like the difference between playing Poker or playing the one-armed bandits at Atlantic City. People write books about poker. There are "good" poker players and "bad" poker players. There's strategy involved. A good player has real skill and can usually beat a poor player. But who writes books about strategy in throwing coins into a slot-machine? Either you got three cherries or you don't. By the way, this is NOT a gambling endorsement, any more than my talking about the Eagles is permission for you to skip worship to watch the game.

Fishermen depend more on faith and the good-will of God than almost any other Galilean profession. I believe that's why Jesus picked them, and not shepherds, vineyard workers, farmers, or fellow carpenters.

III. What Does This Mean for Us Today?

In the time honored Lutheran tradition, let us ask, "What does this mean?" It means there's something about being a disciple that depends less on skill and more on faith in Jesus. The Lord wants us to believe in his working through us, that if we cast the nets he will look after whether there are fish in them or not.

Frankly, it's a message we all need to hear, for two reasons. The first is that it frees us to cast our nets out more often. There's an old proverb that says you can't win if you don't play. You can't catch any fish with your net stuck in the boat, either. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a very simple net to throw out.

- You see a friend dealing with some personal problems or health concerns. Maybe her daughter's thinking of aborting her child instead of giving her up for adoption. So you invite them to come to church, and hear about a Lord who promises to wipe away every tear and pain in the paradise he is preparing for us. A God who creates and sustains all life, and calls us to do the same.

- You visit a neighbor who thinks Sunday is for football. So you ask him or her to come to worship Wednesday night and learn about the game of life, and that God has more in store for us than being football fans forever.
- Your kids are finding it hard to raise two children and work and keep their marriage together. So you invite them to come and learn about a Lord who invites everyone to come to him for rest. You invite them to come and get fed by the Word of God in Adult Bible Study while their kids learn about their Lord and Savior from our Sunday School teachers.
- You see so much evil and destruction around the world and wonder what you can do. So you bring yourself here to St. Mark's to learn about our mission to Liberia and how you can help with that, to get involved in our new young adult group, campus ministry, services at Fair Acres, a building project, or an evangelism effort with our evangelism team. You discover that you may be a simple fisherman, but with God even simple fishermen can go on to change the entire world forever. One of those simple fishermen has a throne and a cathedral named after him in the heart of the city that once crucified him upside down.

Then there's the second point of God choosing fishermen. It's this – you don't control the fish. You may cast your net out all night long, all along the lake, and never catch a blessed thing. Is that your fault? Not really. But then you never know when the Lord will come along after a lifetime of work and say, "Here – cast the net out the other side."

We are disciples of the Lord not because we are the rich and powerful of Delaware County, not because we are all honor roll graduates with Ph.D.s from Harvard and MIT and Princeton, not because we are anything special in the eyes of the world. We are disciples because our LORD HAS CALLED US and MADE US disciples. We may cast out the nets of the Gospel to all those around us, but never forget it is the Lord who determines when and how the nets will be filled.

Conclusion

That's why Jesus chose fishermen. So we wouldn't trust in our own abilities and intelligence and eloquence of speech – so that we'd trust in him instead. I conclude with the words of the great mission him, "Rise, Shine You People":

Come, celebrate your banners high unfurling /
 Your songs and prayers against the darkness hurling /
 To all the world go out and tell the story / of Jesus glory
 Tell how the Father sent his Son to save us /
 Tell of the Son who life and freedom gave us /
 Tell how the Spirit calls from every nation / his new creation

That's the net – go cast it out – and trust our Lord to do the rest.
 He'll accomplish his purposes more fully than we can possibly imagine.

Amen.