

Follow Me Matthew 4:12-23

INTRODUCTION

Two of my five grandchildren are in school. Gabriel is a 2nd grader at Shawnee Elementary and Allie is in kindergarten at Pleasant Crossing School in Greenwood, IN where her Mommy is a fourth-grade teacher. They are learning all the things we would expect them to learn at their age levels.

When Jesus was a little boy, His childhood education started at age five also. Each day young boys would go to the synagogue school. Their education was not focused on learning to count or doing art projects. They went to learn Hebrew and to memorize the Torah (what we know as the first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch).

- By the time of his bar mitzvah at age 13, a typical Jewish young man had memorized all five of those books and probably even more of the Old Testament.
- Those who showed great promise were encouraged to continue their education and begin studying the authoritative interpretation of the Torah known as "The Yoke of Torah." That took about four more years – taking the young man almost to the age of a graduating high school senior in our culture.
- The young men who continued to show great promise were further encouraged to extend their training by spending time (typically ages 17-20) with a rabbi in a multi-year experience. There they would hone their ability to interpret God's Word as it relates to all the practical issues of daily life.

Students at that level would choose a rabbi and ask to become his student. But only a few of these promising students would be selected.

- There were more of them than there were available rabbis. So most students would return home and go back into the family business.

Into that world steps Jesus. He was not a Rabbi in the formal sense, but throughout His earthly ministry people thought of Him in that way. When the Pharisee Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus after dark, he begun by saying:

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. (John 3:1)

Like the Rabbis, though, Jesus extended an invitation to certain individuals to follow Him. In today's text, Jesus calls four: Peter, Andrew, James and John.

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." (Matthew 4:19)

When a Rabbi issued a call, it was a call to “come and learn.” But Jesus called these four men to “follow.” So what does that mean? What does it mean to “follow” Jesus? Let me make three observations:

OBSERVATION #1: THE CALL TO FOLLOW IS A CALL TO BECOME

Who you choose to follow determines who you will become. Those who follow Jesus become people who are engaged in His mission. Verse 19 spells that out. To these fishermen Jesus said:

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Matthew 4:19)

In other words, “Come follow me and learn to do what I do.” Jesus came to reach people for the Kingdom of God. His followers learn to do the same.

A young man named Ed wrote: One cold, snowy Minnesota night, I got lost on my way home from a basketball game. The snow was blowing so fast and piling up so high that I got disoriented. I couldn't see any street signs. My cell phone was dead cell phone so I couldn't access the GPS.

Then breaking through the flurries, I saw the headlights of a snowplow in my rearview mirror. Breathing a quick prayer of thanksgiving, I pulled in behind him and followed the truck, hoping that it would lead me back somewhere I recognized.

I followed that truck for what felt like hours. When he turned left, I'd turn left. He'd swing to the right, and I was right on his tail. After a while, I saw brake lights from the snowplow, followed by four-way flashers. The snowplow had stopped, and I saw the driver get out and approach my car. I rolled down the window to talk to him.

"Why are you following me, kid?" the plow driver asked.

"Well sir, my dad told me if I was ever lost in a snowstorm, I should wait for a snowplow and then follow it."

The driver scratched his head and said "Well son, Now that I am finished clearing the Walmart parking lot do you want to follow me over to Best Buy?"

Who you follow makes a difference in what happens to your life. Follow me, Jesus says, and you will become what I am.

- You will become a person focused on the Kingdom of God.

OBSERVATION #2: THE CALL TO FOLLOW IS A CALL TO MAKE AN IMPACT IN YOUR WORLD

Right after these four fishermen started to follow Jesus He begins to do the things we always associate with Jesus:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

He taught and He cared for the needs of the people. Those broad categories have sort of served as the model for Christian ministry ever since. We have teaching ministries and caring ministries. Those are the basis for every church regardless of denomination. Through those ministries we make an impact in our community and in our world.

But there is another way that impact is felt. When God inspired the writers of Scripture to put into writing the things that He wanted to communicate, He wove the stories together in ways that are beautiful to see. You will always hear me say “read the context” because in the context are elements that help you make sense of what you are reading.

Before calling those four fisherman to follow Him, Jesus preached a sermon on a passage from Isaiah 9. In it are these words:

... 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. (Matthew 4:16 & Isaiah 9:2)

You will hear me talk more about this when we get into our upcoming Lenten series of sermons. I will focus on the I AM statements of Jesus, one of which is

I AM the Light of the World. (John 8:12)

In the very next chapter of Matthew Jesus will tell His followers:

You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)

Jesus is the light of the world. His followers are the light of the world. It is the only one of the I AM statements where Jesus also applies it to those who follow Him.

So Jesus goes from proclaiming that the people living in darkness (sin) will see a great light. And then He calls four fishermen to follow Him and make an impact in their world. The light of Christ shining in and through them breaks through the darkness.

Wherever the followers of Jesus go, the light of Christ shines brightly. And the darkness isn't as dark as it is without them.

One devotional writer writes: Every time on Christmas Eve that I light my candle, I catch myself staring into the flame. I can't seem to help it. In and of itself, my little flame doesn't cast much light, but somehow I find that flame comforting. The flame, small as it is, casts aside the darkness in the space around me. I know this flame is not just a flame, it represents the light of our Lord Jesus Christ – He has come to me and given me hope.

And I know that in a few short minutes I will have to return to the difficulties of my life, health issues, financial worries, problems I know deep down will not go away on their own. But right now, I as I stare into the flame I realize again that I do not have to bear it all on my own. As I stare into the flame, I know that Jesus Christ will see me through.

Then I look up and I see a whole congregation full of light. It is not that each of us are a light, rather, each of us can hold the light of Jesus in our hearts. There is a flame among us, the flame that moves silently among us until there is not a person unaffected by the light – It is then that I finally understand the powerful words of Jesus:

You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)

When you follow Jesus, you make a difference in the world around you.

OBSERVATION #3: THE CALL TO FOLLOW IS A CALL THAT REQUIRES A RESPONSE

When Peter and Andrew heard the call of Jesus, we read:

At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:20)

When James and John heard the call to follow, the text says:

... immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:22)

A positive response is not always the case. Later Jesus will invite three others to follow, and each will have an excuse why doing so is not the right time for them.

- One needed time to settle his financial affairs.
- One needed to care for his aging father.
- And one wasn't pleased with the housing accommodations Jesus would offer.

The preferred response is "Yes" but some will choose "No." The choice is theirs to make. It is just not possible to make no response.

APPLICATION

In his book "All In" Mark Batterson writes:

"Most people in most churches think they are following Jesus, but I'm not so sure. They may think they are following Jesus, but the reality is this: they have invited Jesus to follow them. Too many times I want Jesus to follow me, to serve my purposes, to do my will. But, I want you to join me in saying: "God, I want you to revive my life. I want to follow you. Help me to get out of the way. Navigate my life into following your will." (Mark Batterson, *All In*)

Jesus calls all of us – every man woman and child – to follow Him. How have you responded to that call? Amen.