The Joy of Following Him

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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. [24] So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. [25] And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:18-25)

1. Jesus Called Four Fishermen

Today's scripture talks about four fishermen who joined in the ministry of Jesus. When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison, he went to Galilee and began to preach, "*repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 4:17). One day Jesus walks along the shore of Lake Galilee. There Jesus sees two brothers, Simon, also known as Peter and his brother Andrew. They are fishermen. They are casting their net into the lake. Jesus says to them, "*follow me*." "*I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). The response of these two fishermen is unbelievable. Verse 20 says, "*Immediately they left their nets and followed him."* As soon as they hear Jesus' invitation, they leave the nets and the boat and follow Jesus without any hesitation.

On the same day, Jesus walks further. He sees two other brothers, James and John. They are preparing their nets. Jesus asks them to come with him. Their response is the same as Simon and Andrew's. Verse 22 says, "*Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him."* James and John are fishing with their father Zebedee. But when they hear what Jesus says, they leave both the boat and their father. Can you believe what they respond to Jesus' invitation?

When I read and meditated on this passage last week, it was not easy for me to understand the motivation of Jesus and the four fishermen. Why does Jesus go to the sea of Galilee and invite four fishermen to follow him? Does

Jesus know who the four fishermen are? What makes them follow Jesus even before they discuss Jesus' invitation with their families?

If I were Jesus, I would not go to Lake Galilee and invite four fishermen as disciples. At the time, fishermen were not well educated and were despised by educated people. I would probably look for my followers from a more traditional group of people like the Pharisees. They would have the background and expertise. Like many of us and other Christians, these followers would have already had a history of faith and dedication, much more than the average fisherman at the time.

In this story, we notice that Jesus and the four fishermen make a radical decision. As far as I am concerned, they have totally lost it. Yet the disciples seem to be excited about following Jesus. They are glad to be part of Jesus' ministry. Verses 23 through 25 tells us what Jesus and his disciples do in Galilee. Jesus is teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Large crowds come not only from Galilee but also from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. Aren't we excited about teaching God's word, preaching the good news, and healing every disease and sickness among the people through the power of the Holy Spirit? Certainly following Jesus gives us a great joy.

2. The Joy in Learning Stewardship

About two weeks ago I went to the district seminar on stewardship. This seminar was not the first one that I attended about stewardship. However, this was the first seminar that made me excited about the topic. Most pastors do not enjoy talking about stewardship in worship service because many people in a church will equate stewardship to financial giving. But in the seminar, I learned that we have to approach stewardship from a quite different perspective.

One of the most important lesson at the seminar was "stewardship is not a financial transaction, but a relationship with Jesus." Think about the four fishermen, Simon, Andrew, James, and John. As soon as they hear Jesus' invitation they do not hesitate to follow Jesus. They leave everything behind and join in Jesus' ministry. For some reason, the relationship with Jesus was more important than even their relationship with their family.

Why do you think the relationship with Jesus was so important to the disciples? Let us talk about who Jesus is. He is not simply a human being. Gospel of John 1:3 & 4 say, "*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that had been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men*." The Bible tells us the four fishermen were created by Jesus. The creator invites them as partners, the co-builders of God's kingdom and the farmers scattering the seeds in God's farm. In the time of Jesus, disciples normally chose to become students of a particular rabbi, rather than a teacher

calling his own disciples. The four fishermen are overwhelmed by the favor of Jesus. They realize that becoming disciples is a privilege and honor.

You might criticize them for their abandonment of their families. The Bible does not say much about what happened to their families after they follow Jesus. But I am sure that God would take care of their families through other people. The most important concern for the four finshermen is how to follow Jesus. What does it mean for them to be the followers of Jesus?

3. The Meaning of Being a Disciple

Jesus promises to the fishermen that he would make them "fishers of men." Becoming followers or disciples of Jesus means that they will make others the disciples of Jesus. Disciples are contagious. There are many Christians who are not interested in doing more than attending Sunday worship service. If a person gets excited about following Jesus, he or she should be excited about inviting others to become the disciples of Jesus. Inviting others to become disciples is an expression of love. The way of inviting others does not have to be the same as Jesus'. Everything we do and say can be a kind of invitation.

4. Leaving a Legacy

I've heard this question asked several times, "What will you be known for when you leave this earth?" The most influential people are the ones who leave an impact on others in this life. Physically, we will one day no longer be a part of society. But our contributions and achievements will live well beyond us from generation to generation.

I was touched to hear how Judy Frost left a lasting impact on so many people in Manomet. Many people from the Moose family fraternity came and paid their respects to Judy last Friday. They prepared lunch for those who came for the funeral. I learned that they are so grateful to Judy for her contribution to the Moose family. Shannon Alder said something I thought was memorable, "carve your name on hearts, not on tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you."

If Jesus did not invite the four fishermen as his disciples, no one would remember them. But those who read the Bible remember these disciples because they responded to Jesus and followed Christ in serving others. Jesus' disciples followed Jesus with grateful hearts that Jesus reached out to them first and called them to be part of his ministry. Following Jesus was a joy and honor for the disciples.

5. Obligation or Joy?

Some of my fellow pastors often find being a pastor difficult. Why? It is because they have to be on call 24/7. When something happens, pastors often

need to respond even when it may not be a convenient time. It can be easy to get burned out. But whether we are in professional ministry or are lay followers of Christ, the question is do we have the joy of following Jesus. We are called to the ministry of Jesus not because of obligation but because Jesus wants us to be partners and co-contributors in what God is doing in this world. We become God's hands and feet, serving others.

When I read the Swift Memorial Church profile before my appointment was made by the bishop two years ago, I got so excited because it said "Without just relaying our mission statement, we are a church in need of a leader who will help us go out into the community and be more involved and will help us do more outreach." Whenever I am reminded of this statement, I become excited. The excitement made me invite the Watoto Children's Choir. Outreach to the people in the community gives us a great joy.

St. Paul says in Philippians 4:4, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*" You may know that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. As long as Paul was with the Lord, it did not matter whether he was in prison or out of prison. Staying in prison gave him opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with other prisoners. Are we rejoicing in the Lord always?

6. Conclusion

Although Moses was not excited about accepting God's invitation to deliver God's people from Egypt, he is remembered as one of the greatest heroes in human history. God knew where Moses needed to be and what Moses had been called to in his life. Jesus invites us to follow after him. We accept his invitation knowing that God has a plan for us and for those around us. When we follow Christ, we submit our lives, our priorities, and our families to God's provision and his leading. The work can seem hard at times, but there is nothing that God is not able to lead us through. When we receive God's call, we don't need to worry or be concerned about. It is because God is the one who will accomplish all things. All we need to do is to follow after Him.

7. Application

This morning Wanda is going to share with us about her joy and how it has impacted her life. As we listen to her, I hope we can hear what ways God may be inviting us to follow him. For some of us, following Jesus can sometimes feel like a burden. However, we need to remember that Jesus calls us not just to use us but to give us a real joy in serving him. Jesus invites us to participate in building God's kingdom. By participating in building God's kingdom Jesus wants us to be happy and to live the best life. Becoming his disciples is a great joy and privilege for us.

Do we have the joy of following Jesus even if we may need to give up on something? I pray that you and I are filled with such a great joy and excitement when we follow Jesus Christ. Amen.