

Preached by Pastor Melissa Carmack
January 26th, 2014

Matthew 4:12-23
Jesus Calls the Disciples

I want to ask you to participate with me in an exercise this morning; I'll do it first, and then I'll ask you to imitate what I have done. Here goes: "Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, whoops, Johnny, whoops, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny." Now you try.

No, that's not quite right; let me do it for you again. (Repeat.) Now you try.

Still not right, let's do it one more time, and this time, watch very carefully. (Repeat.) Now you try. You got the fingers and the thumbs right, most of you. And you did very well on the "whoops!" But each time, after I did the "Johnny, whoops" thing, I finished by folding my hands; that's the part you missed. How many of you figured that out? How many of you simply quit? Babies!

The first time I played this game in my own youth group, I was among those of you who gave up. I tried and tried and my youth leader kept telling me that I wasn't doing it right!!! And now as I have done this rather silly exercise over the years, I have realized that if I do it long enough, people ultimately have one of two responses: you either study me long enough to get it, or out of frustration you give up.

The same thing was true on my high school tennis team, when one of the older players tried to teach some of us how to juggle with tennis balls. "Watch me!" she would say, and we would watch her toss three tennis balls, magically, in a circle. When she asked us to try, nobody got it at first, and tennis balls would go flying everywhere, so she would start again; "Follow me! Left hand, right hand, over, under, left hand, right hand." And then we would try again, and again we would fail. Around the 9th or 10th time, some of us were picking it up, but some of our other teammates walked away in frustration. For those who stayed, the more we watched, the more we learned, until finally, some of us could actually do it. We followed...we learned...we became jugglers. Bring me three tennis balls and I'll show you sometime. I can't do more than three...but I can do three!

The point is that we learn to be good at something...or we learn to do something good by following someone else's example. Are you good at fishing? How about cooking? Changing oil in your car? Knitting? Woodwork? Football? Basketball? Who was your teacher? Who was the parent or friend or grandparent who taught you those skills? Who did you learn from? I bet it was someone!

How about being a follower of Jesus Christ? Who taught you how to follow Jesus?

Early each morning, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the bible tells us, fishermen would sit in their boats; mending their nets, and then casting them into the sea to gather a catch of fish. Fishing was probably a trade that had been done in their families for generations; a routine

passed on from father to son through the ages. But then one day, as the fishermen were mending their nets, Jesus came walking along the shore, and he called out to them “You, You, You and you!! Follow me! Follow me, and I will teach you how to fish for people.” Peter and Andrew were the first to leave their nets behind and follow. Then James and John, followed too.

Matthew makes it a point to tell us that they do so IMMEDIATELY. Every time I hear this story, I cringe because I just can’t imagine doing that! Instantly leaving your job...Your occupation...your life! ...Is this what Jesus really expects of us?

And for what? To follow Christ...to fail over and over again at this Christian life...to never seem to get it quite right.

In this season of Epiphany, I can’t help but to think that these fishermen...these disciples... must have had an epiphany themselves...a new understanding or realization about Christ or about themselves in their lives that they were living.

But back up a second...When Jesus called out to them, did you catch what Jesus said to these fishermen?

Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will teach you how to fish for people”. You see, Jesus doesn’t intended for his Peter, Andrew, James & John to simply follow him, like children might follow their parents in a crowded mall. Jesus said “Don’t just follow me, study me...learn from me...watch the way I do things, and then imitate me.”

And Jesus doesn’t ask these men to give up their love of fishing...but rather he asks them to continue fishing...but to fish for people instead of fish! Jesus is telling these men, “Use the gifts and talents that you already have!! In other words, be the banker, or the teacher that you already are...or engage in music or the sports that you love!! But do it for God and live your life as a disciple of Christ in following him in whatever you do and whatever God has placed on your hearts!

Jesus comes to us where we are in our life and calls out to us today, and wants us (for exactly who we are!) to not just follow him, but to learn from him & be one of his disciples in everything that we do...and nowhere does he say we have to do it perfectly. Nowhere does he say that we aren’t going to screw up. Because we will.

Jesus says:

- Follow me and I will make you a business owner for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a wood worksmen for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a paraprofessional for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a barista for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a principal for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a nutritionalist for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a student for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a Nurse for people!

- Follow me and I will make you a Timberwolves enthusiast for people!
- Follow me and I will make you a stay at home mother for people!

God in Christ has chosen us, every last one of us, to be his disciples, his for the people. And God has not chosen us because we are the smartest, or the prettiest, or the richest, or the most popular, or the most likely to succeed. No, God has chosen us because God is God and God is love and God has graciously loved us in spite of ourselves, and when that overwhelming reality suddenly becomes clear to us – all of us then have a moment of epiphany or a moment of realization, and the only rational thing any of us can do at that moment is to lay aside whatever it was we were doing - that we thought was so important - and give it and ourselves - over to God and the Kingdom.

And the strange thing is, when we do that, God turns us around and sends us right back out to do the same thing in the world that we were doing before. But now, we do it differently. We do it knowing we do it not for ourselves, for our own pleasure, or improvement, or material gain, or pay check; we do it for God. We do it knowing that we are in the world as ambassadors for Christ, as citizens of the Kingdom of God. We do our work and live our lives knowing that the most important things we do are those things that help others know that they too are chosen by God, loved by God, wanted by God.

Because once you learn that truth, you can never go back. Once you fully understand that you are loved by God, and that you are called to be a disciple of Christ out of that love, you can't see your life in any other light.

Kind of like our game. Now, I'm going to ask you to do an exercise with me. I'll do it first and then I'll ask you to imitate what I have done.

Here goes: "Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, whoops, Johnny, whoops, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny." Now you try.

May we walk in the light of knowing we've been called. Amen.