

*The Ultimate Fishing Experience*

Matthew 4:18-25

This summer we have been traveling through some of the Old Testament prophets and their quest to turn people back to God. Hopefully we have learned that the people God had nurtured into a holy community had consistently fallen away from God and sought after alternative gods. We have heard how injustices still abounded and we have heard the prophets cry out for change to take place before it was too late. The God we have met in those stories had a tremendous amount of patience and a very strong desire to be in relationship with His people. Sometimes the prophets were heard, but by and large they were neglected, or even killed. Now we come to the new thing that God was able to do to get people back on track, not just for that generation 2000 years ago, but for all generations. It is that new thing we call Jesus that will be the focus for us in this coming year. I would like to explore just who Jesus was and what it is about him that makes such a difference in the lives of millions of people around the world. We will be traveling through the book of Matthew to hear the stories and find out just who this person was. Tom Wright puts it this way for us, "Matthew's gospel presents Jesus in a rich, many-sided way. He appears as the Messiah of Israel, the king who will rule and save the world, He comes before us as the Teacher greater even than Moses. And, of course, he is presented as the son of man giving his life for us all. Matthew lays it all out step by step and invites us to learn the wisdom of the gospel message and the new way of life that result from it." I invite us all to re-read or read for the first time this Gospel and discover for ourselves new things about Jesus that we may not have known. Most of us know the story of Jesus' birth, baptism and temptation in the wilderness. If you are not familiar with those stories, I invite you to read the first four chapters of Matthew on your own some time this week. Let us begin in that fourth chapter with the story of the call of Jesus' disciples. (Read Matthew 4:18-25)

My shamrock is a truly amazing plant. When I am terribly busy, some of the first things that suffer are my plants. This shamrock will wilt and its leaves turn brown before I notice that it needs life giving water. For all practical purposes, I think that the plant has finally succumbed to the neglect we have forced upon it. But I water it anyway hoping it will revive. Usually I continue to neglect it for a few days and when I wander back into the living room I am amazed at the transformation that has taken place. Not only are there new,

beautiful green shamrock leaves but there are tons of beautiful white blossoms. The plant is full and beautiful once again. All my shamrock needed was a little bit of water to take on the look I love about it. Once the water is provided, the plant drinks it in and comes back to life. What is it about water that sparks renewed growth in a plant that appears to be dying? Might it just be the property of water itself, its fluidity, that makes it easy for a thirsty cell to take it in?

What is it about Jesus that makes people who are enmeshed in their life work suddenly give up everything to follow him and to allow their lives to be transformed by him? What is the life giving water of his nature that compels people to act, think and come to life in a new way? Why does he have such power that at the drop of a hat people will follow him? When Jesus walked along the shore of the sea of Galilee and called those first disciples, he completely disrupted the social standing and finances of two families. The father's more than likely lost income from their sons' departures and the ones called left the modestly secure livelihood to follow a very uncertain path. Today we wonder why people give up relatively secure occupations to follow Jesus. Why does the lawyer, doctor, nurse, teacher give up their career to become a pastor or a missionary? Why do people leave lucrative jobs and refuse to "go with the flow" when bosses act unjustly or illegally to gain profit, to follow Jesus?

The answer to those types of questions lies in who Jesus was. In his astonishing magnetism Jesus had the power to call people to drop what they are doing and follow. Those first disciples had no idea what they were getting in to. Perhaps they had heard of this man from a friend or relative but Matthew makes it clear that this calling was spontaneous, prior to the times that Jesus became known for his healings. There was simply something about Jesus that drew them instantly to him. They could not see the future, but something drew them. Jesus had the power to draw them. Why? Perhaps it was because God was so strongly present in Jesus and the innate longing people have to know their Creator helped them recognize the Divine Presence in Jesus. Those first disciples recognized God in Jesus and did not know how to respond other than to drop what they were doing and follow and engage in the ultimate fishing experience.

Today Jesus has just as much power to call people to follow. That might not happen suddenly, but can happen in a variety of ways. Perhaps a person has been struggling for

quite some time with a restlessness they don't know how to answer. Perhaps a travel through the depths of some very great difficulty finally brings a person to their knees receptive to a call from Jesus to follow. Perhaps a person has learned the stories through years of Sunday School or Bible study and then one day the light gets turned on and a true relationship with Jesus is the outcome. Perhaps like Jonah in the Old Testament we hear the call of God and run away, only to find later that the answer to our fear lies in answering God through Jesus' call.

Any way that it happens, we do not find Jesus on our own. Those disciples did not seek Jesus out. He came to them and invited them into the kingdom of God. We don't know that ~~someone~~ <sup>some</sup> wants us to come to dinner unless we are invited. We cannot enter into that special relationship with God unless Jesus invites us into that relationship. Jesus works within us to bring us to that time when we are so deeply aware of our need for God that we hear the call and follow.

But what is it that we are called to? First and foremost we are called to a deeper relationship with our Creator through Jesus and second we are called to a different way of understanding and doing life. Those first disciples were called to a ministry of healing and teaching the good news of the Kingdom. They were suddenly thrust into the limelight as Jesus' fame spread. These were simple folks, earning a simple living called to a non-stop ministry to other people, not for profit, but for the benefit of others so that they too could become part of this new thing that God was doing.

When we are called to join Jesus in the good news about the kingdom of God, we are enabled to do for others in a new and powerful way. We are called to live life differently starting with our own decisions in life great and small, starting with the most intimate details of our lives, those little things about us that we like to hide, but may be interfering with God's way of working with us. It isn't all about, "What am I going to get out of it?" It is about spreading the gospel message of God's love and hope to our often very troubled world. It isn't so much about having a personal relationship with Jesus as about reaching out to others with that relationship so that they too can become a part of God's re-creating this world that has gotten off kilter with its abundance of sin and death. It's about living with a family of faith that is empowered to make significant changes in this world in the lives of those around us. We are called in our simplest conversations and actions to witness to our

faith. Acts of kindness, charity and statements of faith help God work with others so that they too can hear the call and follow. It's about being empowered to give up our sins, our addictions, our unjust way of treating others, and doing the right things in the face of pressure to do otherwise, maybe even to give up a life style or career to enter into a ministry we are afraid to do. Jesus, in his call is giving us the life giving water to begin to bloom, to show the flowers of the kingdom, just like the Shamrock plant when it is finally given the water that enlivens it, not just for our benefit but for the benefit of others.

So, the first thing we learn about Jesus is that he is the one who calls. He is empowered to wake us up to another possibility for our lives. Jesus finds the divine within us and works with it until we can drop what we are doing and say, "Yes, I will follow!" From then on it's anybody's guess as to what God will be asking us to do, but one thing is sure, we will be empowered to do it!