The Journey to the Cross with Jesus in Lent

Part 2: The Calling of the First Disciples

Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

**Introduction**

Good morning! Today we are in the second week of advent. As we prepare for holy week, we will be using these times together to travel with Jesus through Scripture on His journey to Jerusalem and His eventual death and resurrection. Each week we are focusing on an aspect of His ministry that points us to the cross and guides us as we take time during this season of Lent to reflect upon our sin, repent of that sin and experience the renewal of our lives that God gives us through the atoning sacrifice of His Son. Last week we looked at the temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness before He began His earthly ministry. We learned that the way to overcome temptation is to use Scripture, work together as the body of Christ to encourage each other and pray that God would equip us with the ability to stand firm in the faith. This morning our passage of study is Matthew 4:18-22 when Jesus calls the first disciples into the ministry. What we will learn today is that when Christ calls us to follow Him, He gives us the opportunity to leave our old life behind and begin living in a way that focuses on Him rather than our own pride. Since we have already read our passage of study together earlier, we will just jump right into the text.

**Matthew 4:18**

 In the first 17 verses of Matthew chapter 4 we have provided for us the account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness by Satan. After Jesus returns to be in the presence of men after that time of testing, He immediately begins the process of choosing His disciples who will eventually be tasked with spreading the gospel to all parts of the world. As the passage begins, we see that the first two disciples called to follow Jesus will be Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Matthew records that these two brothers were casting their net into the sea because they were fishermen. This is an important aspect of the lives of these men that should not be overlooked. What is so interesting is that fishermen during this time of history were people that were often looked down upon because they were not known as being well educated or those that contributed to society. This was the case because many times when someone was born into this occupation, they would take over for the father later in life. Later in verse 21 and in the gospel of Mark when Jesus calls James and John to follow Him the account includes that their father Zebedee was in the boat with them as they were mending their nets (Mark 1:19-21). This family dynamic of the sons following in the footsteps of the father was a common practice during the time of Jesus. Therefore, most of the men who were fishermen were not considered to be great in society and were many times looked down upon by those who were educated and wise in the Law. For example, the Pharisees make the comment in the Gospel of John that a prophet never comes from Galilee, since that region of the country was rather poor and made up of carpenters, fishermen and common people (John 7:52). There was a snobbish attitude even back in that day against those who seen as inferior in higher circles.

 The reason we have been talking so much about fishermen is because Jesus called these men to be His disciples not because they were well-educated or important men in society, He called them to follow Him because He had a plan for their lives and knew what they would eventually be able to do in the ministry. Just as God said to the prophet Samuel when He chose David to be the second king of Israel, **“’Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7).** Jesus was not judging these men on their earthly occupation, their intelligence or their popularity with men. Rather, Jesus chose them because He knows the heart and also knew how they would be used to glorify Him and spread the good news of the gospel.

**Application #1: Do not judge by outer appearance!**

 Jesus is teaching us in this first verse a very important lesson. In our society today there is a lot of judging that takes place among people. Some of the ways that people are judged are by their material possessions, their appearance (how pretty or handsome they are), their popularity or how many people know them and finally by how much money they have. All of these outward ways of judging others is what the world is fascinated by because man can only see the outside of someone else, they do not have the ability to look into the heart. The church must be careful not to allow the lure of these outer attractions to impact the way that it treats people. In the Epistle of James, we learned that partiality is not a practice that the church should be involved in because when it focuses on wealth that leads to favoritism, which goes against the nature of God. God does not show partiality and is not impressed with the wealth or earthly wisdom that someone has. When someone comes to our church and desires to worship God, we are called to welcome them as a fellow image-bearer of God. We are also called to share the good news of the gospel with them and teach the Word of God to them so that they might come to repentance and experience the new life that can be found in Christ. Even though we are not called to be judgmental, we are called to practice sound judgment and make certain that we are following the Word of God to the best of our ability. Just because someone may not have money, power, influence or popularity that does not mean that God cannot use them for the work of His kingdom. Jesus took these regular men and molded them into Apostles who would build the foundation for the church. May we not limit ourselves by our own prejudices, but may we be open to allowing God to lead and show us the way we are to go.

Matthew 4:19

 Continuing on with verse 19 we now see that Jesus is going to call these men to follow Him with these words “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people.” This is such a powerful statement for Jesus to use with these men. They worked in an occupation where they had to use their skill and knowledge of fishing to bring in a plentiful catch. What the men would now be doing is having a first-hand access to the Son of God who would mold them into the preachers of the Word that He wanted them to be. This is also work that takes practice and work to develop a skill in. In order for the men to take on this new challenge they had to be willing to leave their old life behind and start a new direction. As we look closely at verse 19, we see the way that Jesus works in the lives of those He calls to service: 1. When these men were called into the ministry with Jesus, we see that He called them to serve meaning that He initiated the conversation with them. When we make ourselves available, God will use us to do His good work. 2, The second aspect of this invitation is that Jesus is calling the men to follow Him, which means that He desires that they follow His ways and learn of Him. When we see the teachings of Jesus in the gospels, we see Him several times telling His listeners that if they are to be the ultimate servant, they need to take up their cross and follow Him. When doing this He is asking those who follow Him to follow His example, which is to love others in a sacrificial way by laying down their lives for them. Following Christ is not only following His commandments and doing our best to abide in His Word, following Christ is also actions we take towards others. When we share our faith despite the reaction of the world and are willing to be shamed for the good news of the gospel we are following the example of Christ. Jesus is calling the disciples to follow after Him in this manner. 3. The third part of this invitation is that Christ is calling the men to become fishers of people. The work of ministry involves going out to where the people are and reaching them with the good news of the gospel. Just like a fisherman must know his craft and be skilled in it, those who go out into the world to share the gospel must also be prepared for the environment they will be put in. As a church family that is what we do here together every Sunday. Not only do we gather together to enjoy companionship, but we are being fed with the truth of Scripture so that we can go out into the world to make disciples for Christ. Jesus will use the next three years in ministry with the disciples to prepare them for the work He has commissioned for them.

**Application #2: We must be willing to be used for His glory.**

 We are told in the accounts in the gospels that the men immediately left their nets and father begin to follow Jesus. In doing this they were willing to leave their old life behind and look forward to what God would do with them. This is what God asks us to do when we come before Him during this lent season and confession our sins to Him. He desires that we not only confess that we need His saving power, but He also calls for us to repent of those sins and turn from those into a new life. This change is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit who will change our desires if we truly repent and ask the Lord to do so. The new life in Christ is what Nicodemus in John chapter 3 came to know as being born again. Instead of looking at the world just in physical terms the Holy Spirit enters and allows us to see things spiritually meaning that when we study God’s Word, He will enlighten us to know its meaning. When we have grasped it, we can then use what we know to share the light with others. This rebirth is how we bring glory to God and also how we bring the good news of salvation to those who are lost.

Matthew 4:20-22

 As we conclude looking at the passage today, we now come to the section where Jesus calls James and John to follow Him as well. What is so striking in these verses is that the men immediately leave their work and family behind to follow Jesus. The reason why this is so powerful is because these men were willing to follow Jesus even though they did not know at the time where this would take them. It is very appropriate to think that these men were probably excited to be a part of something new that would take them to places they had never been before. However, it is also very appropriate to conclude that these men were also unsure of what lay before them in the days and years to come.

 As we think more about the calling of the disciples this could cause us to also think about our own walk with the Lord. We need to ask ourselves “Are we willing to follow Jesus, even when it leads us to places we don’t expect?” We need to ask this question because this will show us whether we really trust Christ or not. This is also the question that the disciples had to ponder as well. Looking at verses 20-22 there are a few observations we need to make: 1. Firstly, we see that these men do not hesitate to follow Jesus when He called them. This example the disciples provide for us shows us the importance of making God the priority in our lives. It is easy in the world today for us to allow the distractions all around us to delay our response to Christ. When He calls us to serve in the kingdom we need to respond immediately because it is through such a response that God’s kingdom will prosper. When the prophet Isiah was called to share the word with Israel his response was **“Here I am, send me” (Isaiah 6:8).** It is through faithful obedience that the word of the Lord can be proclaimed. May we always be willing to be used for such a purpose not allowing our busy lives to get in the way of our calling. 2. Jesus called these men to become fishers of men meaning that they would also be proclaiming the good news to all men. Jesus did not only call these men to follow Him to be His companions, He called them so that He could disciple them and then after He went back to heaven, they would continue His work. This is exactly what the church is called to do. The purpose of a disciple is not to just teach others, but to mentor and to make more disciples for the kingdom. We need to follow the example of Christ in the way that we do our ministry in this church.

**Application #3: We are called to make disciples.**

 What we learn in these last few verses is that God has called the church to make disciples for the kingdom. The way that the church does this is by reaching out to the community, provide opportunities for members of the church to connect with others and also by equipping the people of the church to establish relationships with others that will result in new disciples for Christ. In the next few months, we will be looking to do some outreach events here in the Nankin Community so that we can reach those in this area who do not have a church home as well as to those who do not yet know the Lord. The first step in making disciples is for the church to reach out to the community letting the people know that we are here for them. We have had some discussions in church council regarding some ideas on how to do this. One possible way is for the people of the church to visit homes in Nankin and drop off some materials so that they know the church is here and that they are welcome to join us. We may drop off a postcard with church information as well as some other materials to connect with the people. As the summer approaches we will begin asking for volunteers to help us reach people in town. After we get the word out then we will focus on establishing relationships with people in Nankin by offering opportunities for fellowship. We have discussed hosting a hog roast or another type of outdoor event where people could come and join us for some food and connecting with the church. Getting people to come out of their homes and connecting with the church will allow us to begin discipleship in Nankin. The final step in the approach is to open our building to allow people to come in and become more familiar with the church building as well as the people.

 I would like to reiterate that all of these endeavors have the goal of the church connecting with the community so that more people can hear the good news of the gospel and so that we can do obey the Great Commission by making more disciples in the Nankin Community. We look forward to the opportunities we have available to share the love of Christ with others.