

Encounters with Jesus – Follow the Leader
Matthew 4:12-23
Third Sunday After the Epiphany
January 26, 2020
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Matthew 4:12-23 (NRSV) Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee

¹² Now when Jesus^[a] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness

have seen a great light,

and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death

light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”^[b]

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁸ 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.

Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

²³ Jesus^[c] went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news^[d] of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

In 1972, NASA launched a space probe named Pioneer 10. The satellite’s mission was to reach Jupiter and beam data back to Earth.

Before that, no satellite had gone farther than Mars.

And Pioneer 10 had to go through a belt of asteroids to continue on it’s journey.

Bold, huh?

But Pioneer made it – and the data came back as hoped.

THEN, Jupiter's gravity hurled the satellite toward the edge of the solar system – past Saturn and Uranus and Neptune and Pluto – that's 4 billion miles from the sun. Billion! With a **B**!

NASA lost contact with Pioneer 10 in 2003 but before the last "bleep" a spokesman said,

"Perhaps most remarkable, is that those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth."

It blows our imagination to think of accomplishing SO much, with so little.

Astronaut, Jim Lovell, who commanded the scary Apollo 13 mission once said,

"At one point (in space) I sighted the earth with my thumb — and my thumb, from that distance, fit over the entire planet. I realized how insignificant we all are if everything I'd ever known is behind my thumb."

Compared to God... we ARE insignificant.

Some would say, we're not all that *impressive* either.

And yet – God wants to use us.

God has even prepared things for us to do!

But many people don't do anything for God because they don't they are important enough for Him to pay attention to.

I believe THAT'S one of the main reasons Jesus chose those first disciples, Peter, James and John. They weren't all that important.

They were just stinky fishermen.

And yet... when Jesus got done with them, they shocked the world.

Their "orbit" and "trajectory" is still going!

So, can God use us? Yes!

And the more time we spend encountering and being with Jesus in God's Word, the more God can equip us to do what God has planned.

Do you remember playing Follow the Leader? One person was the leader and the rest of the players were followers – they had to follow along and do exactly what the leader did.

And do you remember the BEST part? It was being the leader – ‘cause NOBODY wants to just follow all the time.

Webster’s definition of follow is “*to go or come after someone or some thing...to copy.*”

I’m thinking about “following instructions” – DO YOU?

It’s our human nature to want to lead and be “in charge” and *think* we can be in charge! When it comes to following someone – our nature is to NOT play second fiddle. And instructions – Phthththb – who needs those?

Well, following OUR leader, Jesus Christ, is a constant way of life. And when we focus on our identity – as we talked about last week – that we fill in our “Hello I Am _____” badge with FOLLOWER OF JESUS – we can find a few realities for that way of life.

We have to become **CENTERED**.

We know Jesus as our Good Shepherd, yes?

And we know that the sheep follow their shepherd’s voice?

We have to listen for and follow, with complete focus, Jesus.

And everything we do should be about HIS care and compassion for others.

Center on that.

And when we do - we’ll be **CHANGED**.

Take, for instance, Peter, James and John from today’s reading. Jesus said he’d make them “fishers of men.” They hung out with him for a while and then when Jesus went – they went. Without hesitation!

Chris Tomlin is a Christian musician, must have been thinking about those first disciples when he wrote his song called “I Will Follow.”

Let me read you the words of the refrain:

Where You go, I’ll go

*Where You stay, I'll stay
When You move, I'll move
I will follow....*

Those disciples moved out. There were no more (daily) nets as they became successful disciples.

Hear that – they “**became.**”

It wasn't a one time event!

And when **we** truly follow Jesus we can't be the same anymore either – we change and we **become** what God has in mind for each of us.

Will it be easy?

Doesn't say that anywhere.

With **CHANGE** comes **CHALLENGE**.

Remember the ache of our bones that our Grandmas called “growing pains”?

Well, when we follow Jesus IT IS CHALLENGING!

Our lives really should be in a constant state of growth...

...of striving to know him better...

...and to behave and speak like he spoke so that God's love is made apparent to those around us...to remind those who *should* know **and to share** and teach those who *don't know him yet*.

Following Jesus CAN BE one of the greatest joys of our lives AND one of the greatest challenges, 'cause we can't play it safe; we have to take some risks in our lives.

What we can be assured of though is that God IS equipping us to serve.

That feels good, doesn't it?

But, Dear Ones, equipping us is *only part of the story*.

It DOES US NO GOOD TO BE EQUIPPED – nada, zilch, zero - if we don't do something with it!

So, one of the first things we can ALL do is introduce somebody to Jesus. It can be as simple as inviting someone to join us here on Sunday mornings. Or sharing a cup of tea – maybe even to have lunch with us during the mid-week Bible study. YOU, Dear One who is squirming in your pew – YOU DON'T HAVE TO TEACH...just offer some hospitality!

Do you remember that later on, Jesus sent the disciples out, in pairs, to talk with people? They were kind of like Jesus' advance promotion team. They were the front-runners to let folks know Jesus was coming to their village. The disciples healed on that trip.

I AM NOT saying that we're equipped – THOUGH SOME OF YOU MIGHT BE; our Spiritual gifts include healing....
...but in simplest terms – those disciples were meeting people and providing the "balm" of addressing their needs. THAT'S HEALING!

We can do that.

During the "C's in the Parking" lot events we meet people (I pray that more of you will join us next time) and we met them with coats and SOCKS – DUMB SOCKS to address their needs.

We can...YOU can do that.

Those meetings in the parking lot give us the chance to SHOW others – not beat them over the head with a "Jesus talk" – but show them that they are part of God's loved creation.

You can do that!

It's not hard. *When we are changed, the challenge comes to be **determined to carry Christ's message into our own personal world!***

Let's think back to the game Follow the Leader again.

The key to that game is to fully copy the actions of the leader.

It's the same to following OUR LEADER, Jesus Christ.

We are called and when we follow we're changed.

And in that change we grow and that part can be challenging, I'll admit, more than sometimes we'd ever know.

Alex Trebeck, the host of tv's game show Jeopardy, was once asked "How many answers do you know?"

Trebeck replied: "All of them. I have the answers on the cards in my hand!"

Dear Ones, we've got the ENTIRE manual available to hold in our hands.

Our Bibles hold the answers so that we can read and hear how to do our very best to copy Jesus...

...his example is, first, for us....and then FROM us to others.

And here's one last thought...

Yes, we are called. And yes, sometimes that is challenging, but...

DON'T OVERTHINK what God is asking us to do...or underestimate our abilities to accomplish what God has asked.

Back when NASA began sending astronauts into space, one of the things those astronauts were asked to do was keep logs; to write down information.

Regretfully, the astronauts soon discovered that they had a problem.

Since they'd never been in space before, they didn't know that their pens wouldn't work in zero gravity.

Huh, they were like the disciples – going into the unknown where there were unanticipated (I'll call them) "opportunities" that they had to overcome.

Or because of the unknown, many people become – the "frozen chosen" who won't GO because of "what *might* happen."

But God! Remember?

God calls us to do....AND equips us to accomplish. God makes the way.

The astronauts and the researchers at NASA spent TEN YEARS and \$12 BILLION to develop a pen that **would** write in zero gravity.

NASA accomplished that goal.

Funny thing – the Russians, in the space race with the U.S.A., didn't have as much money, so they came up with a simpler solution: they used pencils. Ha!

The point is: don't overthink the challenge of being a servant for God.
It doesn't have to be hard – it is NOT rocket science.

It is, however, a matter of encountering Jesus as we're doing in Epiphany - like Peter, James and John,...

...listening to Jesus say, "Follow me" and "do what I do"...

...and letting God use YOU to change the world.

You DO identify yourself as "Hello I AM – a Follower of Jesus Christ" – Yes?

You're called.

You ARE changing as you grow in Christ and you ARE equipped to meet the challenges of sharing God's love WHO IS Jesus Christ.

Follow the Leader.

Amen!