

Called by Jesus 1) Called to Faith 2) Called to Follow 3) Called to Fish

Can you see what I have here with me? This is my cell phone. I carry it with me all the time, and my guess is that almost all of you, or at least many of you, carry a phone like this in your pocket or in your purse, as well. I remember when cell phones were brand new and only a few people had them. In fact, I remember when phones were stuck to the wall and you had to use the rotary dial to make a phone call. Now, smart phones like this are very powerful tools that do all kinds of things. They can be a navigator to help you drive to your destination; they can connect you to the internet; they can serve as a camera or even a video recorder; they can send messages to other phones; you can even play games on your phone. (Hopefully none of you were playing Candy Crush or checking Facebook right before the service.) But for all the things these smart phones can do, their main purpose is still to make phone calls; that's their primary function – to call someone you want talk to.

Today in our gospel, we see Jesus making some calls; but, of course, he's not using a cell phone. In Bible, when someone calls someone else, the word "call" is being used in the way we used it before we had phones. Just picture a mother finishing up supper in the kitchen, and her kids are out playing in the backyard; so she calls them to come in for supper. Or think about a basketball coach when free throws are being shot, and he calls a player over to sideline to coach him. Or think about our First Lesson from last Sunday – how the Lord called Samuel, but Samuel thought Eli was calling him. Before phones, to call someone meant to summon, beckon, or invite them to come to you, because you had something good for them to have or good for them to do. "Come on in, kids; supper is ready." "Come here; you've got to guard that guy." You summon; you call someone to yourself.

And that's what takes place in our gospel for today. Jesus calls people – not with a cell phone, but through his powerful word. He calls them to faith, to follow, and to fish.

Called to Faith

First, Jesus calls people to faith. **"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'"** Twice in this reading we hear about the "good news." What is the good news? The good news is the gospel; it's the message of hope and forgiveness, peace and eternal life that come only from Jesus. And here Jesus is inviting people to believe the good news that he is the promised Messiah, the Savior of Israel, who had finally come. And throughout his ministry, Jesus brought the good news to the people: by healing them of deadly diseases, by taking away their physical pain, by feeding them, by raising from dead, by showing kindness to them, by forgiving their sins, by teaching them about the kingdom of God. Here, Jesus says, **"The kingdom of God has come near."** "It's close to you; the Savior is among you!" And while he was among them, Jesus did die on cross as the sacrifice that took away the sins of world; and he did rise from the dead to win eternal salvation for all people. These people saw that; and we see it, too! We believe in Jesus as our crucified and risen Savior from sin, and we know that someday Jesus will bring us to heaven, because Jesus has called us to faith and shared with us the good news.

That word, "good" – it's kind of an understatement, isn't it? It's like Good Friday. This news isn't just good; it's earth-shattering, from-hell-delivering, peace-solidifying, faith-creating. The good news (or the gospel) is the summary of everything Jesus has done to save us; and it's the gospel that brings people to faith. So when Jesus says, **"The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"** what is he doing? He's calling people to faith. And when we believe his words, and truly repent of sins, and see Jesus as our Savior, then we are called by Jesus to faith.

Called to Follow

We're also called by Jesus to follow. **Vs. 16-17a**. When you were a kid, did you ever play Follow the Leader? That's the children's game where all the kids line up, and there's a leader at the front of the line. And as the leader moves around, all the followers mimic the leader's actions. And wherever the leader takes the line, the kids follow behind.

When Jesus calls people to faith, he also calls them to follow him. The two go hand in hand – if you're called to faith, you're also called to follow – the two are inseparable. When you were baptized, you not only were given faith, but you also got in line behind Jesus and started following him as your leader. And there are two important things about this version of Follow the Leader.

First, following Jesus means following no one else. Jesus said, **“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37)**. Just like in the game, there's only one leader. First Commandment – **“You shall have no other gods,”** no other leaders. Yet what leaders do we often follow? We follow our family. We make family priorities more important to us than Jesus, with our kids' club-league sports, our weekend tournaments, our summer vacations by the lake, our Sunday morning family time – none of which bad in itself; but when it gets in the way of Jesus (when you check-out of church for entire summer or sports season), that's not following the leader. What else do we follow? We follow our hearts. And that sounds so romantic (Follow your heart!). But where does our heart lead us? It leads us to sin, because we have a sinful heart. This heart doesn't want what God wants. This heart wants to have sex with the person you're dating, even before you're married. This heart wants to gossip and spread dirty rumors about other people, whether they're true or not (and they're certainly not beneficial). This heart wants to nurse a grudge and say, “That person did or said something a long time ago that offended me; so from here on out, I'm giving them the cold shoulder.” This heart thinks too highly of itself; it doesn't want to follow the leader; it wants to chart its own course. In the New Testament book of Jude (and we don't quote from Jude very often, do we?), it says, **“These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires... These are the people who...follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit” (Jd 16,19)**. But Jesus says, **“Follow me,”** which means, “Follow only me.” And Jesus once said, **“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Mt 6:24)**. We can't follow two leaders. If we're going to follow Jesus, we have to follow only Jesus!

The second important thing about following our leader is this: following Jesus means following him wherever he leads you. Just like in the game: you follow line-leader no matter where he takes you. So it is with following Jesus. Sometimes Jesus leads us places we love to go. Think of Psalm 23: **“He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake” (23:2-3)**. That's a peaceful place, where we're alone with Jesus and his word, and we have inner peace – not just a feeling, but the fact of forgiveness. Or think about Jesus feeding the 5000, or raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. Jesus leads us to these places to show us that he does take care of our bodies, and that someday after our bodies die he will raise them to new life in heaven. So we love following Jesus to these places. But sometimes Jesus leads us places we don't love to go. Jesus says, **“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:38)**. Following Jesus means suffering for Jesus, bearing a cross, and following him places we don't want to go. I think of the Marines in the Vietnam War following their commanding officers back to their camp, over the hills and through the jungles of Vietnam. Following Jesus means you're constantly under attack by Satan; it means you're going to be persecuted by the locals; it means battle fatigue and hard service. That's carrying the cross and following Jesus – Christianity is hard! But never forget where our leader is leading us. Forty days after Easter Jesus returned to heaven. And that's where he's leading us – that's our final destination. The journey may be hard. But Jesus calls us to follow him wherever he leads.

Called to Fish

So we're called to faith, called to follow, and, finally, called to fish. **Vs. 17.** We're more used to the old translation, **"I will make you fishers of men"** (NIV 84). Here Jesus takes these four guys – Simon, Andrew, James, and John – fishermen by trade, and you know what he does. He calls them to fish, which, of course, is a metaphor for evangelism, spreading the gospel, fishing for people.

On the one hand, we're all called to fish. Jesus calls all Christians to share the gospel and to fish for people. So you should always be thinking, "Here's a family member, a neighbor, a coworker, a friend who doesn't know Jesus. I want to invite this person to church and introduce them to my congregation. I want to have conversations with them about Jesus." And there is no Christian who cannot do this, even if you are more of an introvert or you get nervous talking religion. All Christians are called to fish.

On the other hand, in this reading, Jesus is calling four specific individuals to a specific task. They would become apostles of his church, or we might say full-time called workers. So while it's true that all Christians are called to fish, there are some people Jesus calls to fish full-time, on behalf of his church, like pastors and missionaries and Lutheran school teachers, who have been called by God to the specific task of full-time fishing. They spread the gospel, not as a 40-hour-a-week, 2-paychecks-a-month job, but as a calling. And that's not to divide church into called workers and non-called workers. It's simply to recognize that this is Jesus' arrangement; this is how he wants his church to function. Ephesians 4 says, **"Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"** (4:11-12). So you have the body of Christ, and within that body are those specifically called to preach and teach the gospel and be fishers of men. This was Jesus' plan; this is his arrangement.

Doesn't that shape your perspective on the ministry? Doesn't that encourage you not only to be best lay fisherman you can be, but also to support and respect those whom Jesus has called to full-time ministry among you? Doesn't that (to change the metaphor) open your eyes to see **"the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,"** and to **"ask the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest field"** (Mt 9:37-38). Whether its fishing or harvesting, you get the idea: we need more pastors and more Lutheran school teachers, because some fish are not being caught, and some crops are not being harvested. There are people not hearing the gospel; there are children not learning about Jesus. So we need more pastors and teachers to share the gospel. And I wonder if one of those future called workers might just be you (dear student), or the child sitting next to you in the pew (dear parent). Maybe.

Jesus calls us, but not with a cell phone. He summons us, beckons us, and invites us. He calls people to faith, to follow, and to fish. Amen.

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

