

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 4:18-22

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You will have noticed the big increase in traffic this week. That's because the summer holidays are over. The kids are back to school. We are all back to work. And church programs start in earnest. As a friend said on the weekend it's the silly season of the start of the year as everything kicks into gear. So, it's good to be reminded of why we do all that we do as God's people. We have summed it up in our congregation's Mission Statement, 'Hope in the Hills Christian Church is called to bring hope to the hills community by sharing the good news of Jesus through word and action and growing as disciples who also make disciples of others.' In other words, we are disciples of Jesus who grow to be more like Jesus and who go make disciples of others. That's our calling as a church.

The idea of calling is central to our text. To get an idea of what that is about, let me ask you, have you ever received a summons? I suppose you could call it an 'enforced invitation'. Some years ago I was subpoenaed to be a witness in a child abuse case in Adelaide. The law required that I attend, and I was forced to leave work and home to be in court. I also saw it as an invitation to be a witness for a person who was abused and help them achieve justice. Now this idea of an 'authoritative invitation' is the key to understanding what it means to be 'called' to discipleship. What we see in our text is Jesus inviting, or giving a summons to four fishermen to follow him.

Let's look at it (Matthew 4:18-22) *"As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting nets into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me", Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and father and followed him."*

Now if you think about this scene thoughtfully it will take your breath away. What just happened here? Matthew paints a very vivid picture. Jesus sees men busy at with their jobs. He sees two brothers casting a 'casting net'. It's a circular net thrown out flat onto the water. When the weighted edge reaches the bottom, it would be drawn together

trapping the fish. This is what Jesus sees. Simon and Andrew are in their daily routine as fishermen. This is what they did everyday, for years. This was their livelihood. And there you also have James and John, sitting together on their boat with their father, mending their fishing nets. So these brothers are also occupied with their regular every day work in the family business. This was their life.

Now along comes Jesus and he “called” them and commanded them “Follow me”. This is interesting. There were lots of disciples in Jesus’ day that followed various rabbis and Jewish teachers. But those disciples were not called or invited. The custom of the time was that they, the prospective students, went to the rabbi of their own choice and sought permission to follow that teacher. The students took the initiative to choose their teacher. So in the culture of the day what Jesus did here in our text would never have happened. But here is Jesus, standing on the beach and interrupting these fishermen right in the middle of their day’s work, calling them to follow after him. Jesus came to them. What is even more amazing is that Jesus didn’t just extend an optional invitation. He summoned them. He commanded them saying “follow me”. This was unheard of. No other Jewish teacher did this. If such a rabbi actually had the audacity, it is highly unlikely that anyone would have actually got up and followed! And especially that would be the case if he called people who were busy at their jobs. But it is exactly what Jesus does. He commands them to drop everything, leave their work and family business and follow him. It is stunning. The question is how will these four fishermen respond? Look at verse 20 *“At once they left their nets and followed him...”* And verse 22 *“...immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him”*. Now ask yourself: why did they follow Jesus? Why ‘immediately’? Why did they just get up and leave their work? How are we to explain this? Well, there is something authoritative, something compelling and majestic in Jesus’ call. From the account in the gospel of John we see that Andrew had heard from John the Baptist about the majesty of Jesus as the Messiah. John had said that he wasn’t even good enough to untie Jesus’ sandals. You get it- John wasn’t good enough to do a slave’s job for this Jesus of Nazareth. We need to see that the call of God comes through Jesus and it is absolute in its authority. It is very interesting that the Greek word ‘call’ in Matthew can actually mean ‘to call, to invite, to summons’. God’s call is like that; it is a summons, it has authority behind it. Yet it is an invitation. The absolute authority of Jesus’ call is not the kind that forces the fishermen to obey against their will. It is the kind that irresistibly draws them to obey of their own free will. Jesus would later remind his disciples (John 15:16) *“You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.”*

So, who is this, what sort of rabbi is it that he commands four fishermen to follow him and they freely and willingly chose to drop everything and follow him? That is the point

Matthew is making here. He is letting us as readers come to the understanding that this Jesus is the Son of God. He is God and as such he can call, he can summon, with absolute authority. Yet he is also the one who laid down his life for those whom he called. Jesus is still calling people today. We who are Christians we have been called, we have been summoned. We have been invited and drawn to Jesus. We ordinary people, whether we are incredibly busy with our jobs, or young people at school or uni, children or elderly, we in our very ordinary situations are summoned by Jesus. How does he do that? He does it through the gospel. When we hear Bible stories at home and 'God's Own' it is God calling us. When we hear the preaching in church, when someone witnesses to us, when we read the Bible, it is God calling us, inviting us; summoning us. Now, here is something totally mind blowing. Do you know when that summons first went out? Before the creation of the world! Before there was anything God already had his eye on you and in his will determined that you would be 'called'. In Romans 8:30 it says: *"Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified..."* The call to be a disciple of Jesus is a summons by the awesome God of all; it's an invitation to serve in his kingdom. We often think that it is only ministers who get 'a call' to serve God. But all of us as Jesus' disciples, have been called; summoned to serve. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1: *"...live worthy of the calling you have received..."*

Now notice in the text what Jesus 'calls' these fishermen to do. *"Follow me...come behind me"*. In a sense the summons to service is surprisingly simple. It's not complicated. Just 'follow' Jesus and you will get to where you need to go. Now, to be sure, the disciples will find out a lot more along the way. Over three years they will grow in their understanding of what is involved in being Jesus' disciples. But at the heart of it, the call is surprisingly simple. Follow Jesus. Stick close to him because he is *"the way...and the truth and the life."* Now I want you to notice that Jesus has a very deliberate strategy here. Jesus had one goal for his ministry (Luke 19:10) which is: *"...to seek and to save that which was lost"*. He wanted his disciples to do the same, remember Matthew 28:19 *"...to make disciples of all nations..."* For these fishermen to do that they needed to take on board Jesus' goal, his passion, his methods, his characteristics; his trust in God. The best way to do that was to "follow Jesus"; to spend every day with Jesus for three years and learn from him, observe what he did; observe Jesus' character and attitude. They were to become just like Jesus. Learning for discipleship was not just a head trip, book learning. Following Jesus, the disciples were equipped in how to live a Christ-shaped life. Many students of the rabbis in Jesus' time appreciated their rabbis' teaching. But the distinctive mark of Jesus' disciples was their personal allegiance to Christ himself. They didn't just call him 'rabbi' or 'teacher' but 'Lord.' They were utterly devoted to Jesus himself, not just his teaching. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be so 'taken' with Jesus that everything else pales into insignificance. To be a disciple of Jesus is to find Jesus so

attractive as to love him, and so compelling as to obey him. These fishermen could only come to that sort of relationship by 'following' Jesus, being with him all the time for three years to really come to know him.

So, it is for us. We follow Jesus in faith. We stick close to him. That means being where he continues to speak to us, which is the Bible. Through the preaching and teaching of the Jesus' word, through the sacraments, Jesus is here, with his church, speaking to us, leading us onward. We stick close to Jesus when we do our own personal devotions, praying and sharing our lives with Jesus. Discipleship is very personal. It means being attached to Jesus. He leads and we follow. We observe Jesus' life and teaching in the gospels, and we see how we should also behave. So, Jesus through his Spirit takes us where he is going. He wants us to take up his characteristics, to take on his passion. He wants us to be the instruments through whom God's call, his summons, goes out to the people we meet and know; like our friends and workmates, our school friends. Jesus trained his disciples to make disciples. That's our calling as well; to make disciples. When we get really close to Jesus, we will see that is his passion. Someone once said, 'Evangelism is the sob of God'. If Jesus' heart becomes our heart, we too will feel deeply for those who don't know God. We will long to be used by God to extend his authoritative 'call' to them as well.

We see this in what happens with the fishermen. Their call to discipleship is profoundly transforming. It changes the direction of their lives. As we said earlier, these fishermen 'immediately' left their nets and followed Jesus. Matthew's purpose in telling this story is to show us that when Jesus calls us, it will mean a complete break with old loyalties as we leave everything to follow Jesus. Jesus now comes first above everyone and everything else. And this happens because when we are called by God we are given new life. We were dead in our sin but now we are alive in Christ. To follow Jesus is to see him go to the cross, where he suffers and dies for all his disciples. Through that suffering all our sins are forgiven and we are right with God. And that changes things in our daily lives. We are the same but changed. We are now disciples of Jesus and our life takes on a new direction. Jesus made it clear how the disciples would go on from fishermen to "fishers of men". They would be the same fishermen, but changed. They would go on in their lives with a changed goal. They would become 'kingdom' people; those who realise the kingdom of God is here in our midst and we need to bring people into that kingdom.

So it is for us. The call to discipleship transforms our daily lives. We might still be a student doing HSC, or an IT worker spending the day with our computer or a tradesman on the job, we might be a father or mother; we are still our very ordinary

selves in our ordinary lives. But we have been transformed. We are now Jesus' disciples, called to serve him. So we are different even if we look the same as we always did. Now we want to be like Christ and serve him. And we want to take on the goal, the passion of Jesus; fishermen who become fishers of men; disciples who make disciples. You know why this is so important, don't you? A fellow called S.D. Gordon in one of his books describes the angel Gabriel in dialogue with Jesus shortly after he ascended into heaven. Gabriel asks Jesus about the plans for evangelism. Jesus replied, 'Well I asked Peter and James and John and Andrew and a few others to make it the business of their lives to tell people and then those others would tell others and finally the whole world would hear the story and feel the power of it.' In the story Gabriel asks, 'But suppose they don't tell others, what then?' Jesus answered quietly 'Oh I have no other plans. I'm counting on them. I don't have any other plans.'

You have been called to be Christ's disciples. You have been summoned by God almighty, invited by Jesus to be part of his plan to save planet earth and its people. Stick close to Jesus, watch him and listen and speak with him every day. Strive to grow in the faith and become mature, become more like Jesus. Peter, one of the fishermen, one of those called in our text, years later summed up discipleship in his letter to the churches: 1 Peter 2:21 *"To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."*