

Matthew 4:12-23

12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so 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— 16the 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.” 17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18As 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. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As 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. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

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

Previously, Jesus had just been baptized by John and called God’s beloved son. After that, he goes to the wilderness and is tempted by Satan, the evil one, who enticed him with popularity, power, and success temptations that still have allure today. Jesus rejects these temptations, knowing they are distractions from his calling to a ministry of love and serving God’s people.

After this, Jesus is ready to begin his ministry. All he needs is a sign. When John the Baptist is arrested, he receives that sign and knows it is time to start his public ministry.

Herod Antipas, a capricious despot, arrests John the Baptist and later has him killed to appease his angry wife because John denounced Herod for marrying his brother's

divorced wife, and this contradicted Jewish law. So, knowing it is not his time to confront Herod, Jesus moves from the Judean wilderness near Jerusalem to Galilee, to a town called Capernaum, a fishing village.

Jesus knows his vocation is to love and serve God's people, and we are all called to do the same. He continues John's message of repentance, change your heart and mind, for God's kingdom is near. This message still calls us today. We all know there are things we need to change. I know I sure do. What about you? Where do we need to change, repent?

In Capernaum, Jesus teaches us an important lesson. Instead of trying to do it all by himself, he begins to recruit disciples who will follow him and help with his mission to spread the good news of God's love for all.

In this fishing village of about 1000, he encounters Andrew and Peter, whose job is fishing. Now, fishing then was not like it is now. It was not out on the lake with a cooler and maybe a friend or two, and enjoying the day, whether we catch fish or not. In Jesus' day, fishing was hard manual labor, heavily controlled and taxed by Rome. The main benefits of this strenuous work went to the wealthy, not to the fishers themselves. Fishing was arduous subsistence work, at best, with no escape from the poverty that ground down almost 90% of the population.

I don't know if Jesus had a prior relationship with Peter and Andrew, but I tend to think so. I think he developed a relationship with them. So, one day, Jesus comes by them and says, "It's time, follow me." They are ready. He tells them. "I have a better way of life for you. Help me spread the good news of God's love for God's people," and they left their work and followed.

Jesus takes the initiative, unlike other Rabbis and teachers of his time, who were asked by would-be disciples if they could follow. Jesus goes out and seeks followers who will help him with his ministry and mission, just as he is seeking us today.

Jesus then comes to James and John, also fishers, and says the same thing. They also leave their families and go with Jesus. Just like the boy in the song **The Boxer** by Simon and Garfunkel, they left their home and family. In addition, they left their jobs.

I think this imagery is intentional on Matthew's part. Jesus calls us to a new allegiance that transcends and undergirds all our relationships. They have moved from just a job to a new vocation, or calling, as they become disciples.

This change doesn't destroy the old relationships; it strengthens them. Our faith strengthens our work and our families. We know that. It picks up on Jesus' and John's theme of repentance/change of heart and mind as these new disciples experience a powerful change in their lives in response to Jesus' call. They are called from serving the Roman and Jewish upper class to serving all of God's people.

So, to these fishers who were barely sustaining a life, Jesus beckons. And they follow him. He was calling them from serving the Roman Empire to serving God's Kingdom, doing something beyond just supporting Rome. Now they sensed they would be doing something that mattered to God and God's people, not just enrich the elite. They now have a vocation, a calling, to follow Jesus and love and serve all people, just as Jesus does. They have work that matters to them.

They heed Jesus' call to their vocation. Now, many folks don't have a sense of vocation, a call by God, and see it as vaguely connected to their job, retirement status, or something only ministers have. But we all have a vocation. We are all called to be and do something. Just because we haven't recognized or experienced a sense of call doesn't mean we don't have one. For those of you who have your sense of calling, you know how deeply it matters.

We all have a vocation. Part of our vocation is first to see ourselves as children of God. It means seeing ourselves as a treasure, not in some narcissistic self-centered way, but having a great sense of worth because we are in the image of God, and by extension, so are the people we encounter. We are all children of God. It reminds me of Mr. Rogers singing, "You are my friend, you are special."

Our calling also means doing God's will in our daily lives. We don't have to be moral and ethical giants like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As David Lose puts it, Jesus calls everyday people living out ordinary lives to do great things among ordinary people. We are summoned to find our vocation in the service of God and others.

I love the Mac Macnally/Jimmy Buffett song, "It's My Job." It goes:

In the middle of late last night, I was sittin' on a curb
I didn't know what about, but I was feelin' quite disturbed
A street sweeper came whistlin' by, he was bouncin' every step
It seemed strange how good he felt, so I asked him while he swept
He said, "It's my job to be cleaning up this mess"
And that's enough reason to go for me
It's my job to be better than the rest
And that makes a day for me

<https://youtu.be/QpSCgEx7zJg?si=5yjuvm6ihJUx1Jrm>

There is someone with a sense of vocation!

Like the song, we all have a vocation to do something at a high level; it may be our job, or volunteer work, or looking after a neighbor, working to combat hunger and poverty, or something else, but we all have a calling.

It reminds me of what Robin Sharma calls leaders without a title, people who treat what they do as art and give it great care. We can sense these people when we meet them.

It is like that saying from the Reagan family on Blue Bloods:

"I am only one, but still, I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something, and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do what I can."

Each of us has a calling. For followers of Jesus, as his disciples, we have a vocation to love God and love our Neighbors, and we have to work out how to do it in a way that fits our spirit. Or as one person put it, where our passion meets the world's need, at that intersection is our calling, our vocation. And the world's needs are boundless.

Let's put our God-given talents in the service of God's world and people in a way that resonates with our hearts. If you haven't found where your passion, and the world's needs intersect, make it a priority. Pray about it, talk with your significant other, with close friends, even your pastor. You do have a calling from Jesus; each of us does.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John were called to follow Jesus and help him proclaim repentance and the nearness of God's kingdom, and the reality of God's love for all. And so are we, and we all can do something to work with Jesus and share God's love. They are called to follow Jesus just as we are. We need to find our own unique response to Jesus' call to follow him. When we do, Jesus gives us a sense of vocation. Today, we will elect formal leaders in our congregation, elders and deacons. We will be the voice of God, calling and recognizing them as those we will trust to lead us as they follow Jesus. Those are not just jobs in the church; they are part of their vocation. Their calling is to work with us and guide us as we seek to follow Jesus.

So, after the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John, scripture says they went with him through Galilee, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing the sick and curing diseases. This was vital work due to Roman imperialism, which subjected most of the population to severe systemic poverty. As a result, diseases and illnesses were widespread. That is one reason for the healing miracles in the Gospels. Systemic poverty caused many diseases, and Jesus sought to relieve some of the suffering caused by systemic injustice. This was true then, and fighting the effects and causes of systemic poverty is still a noble calling for God's people.

Jesus announces the nearness of the kingdom that contrasts with life in Roman-occupied Galilee. Where Rome rules with terror, violence, elitism, and conquest, God's way is love, compassion, teaching, and healing.

While Rome needed to conquer to sustain the Empire constantly, more conquests of other peoples were necessary to do so. We, on the other hand, need to love and serve God and humanity to build God's peaceable kingdom.

Jesus' way, our way, differs from Imperialism. His call is to change hearts, minds, and lives—not in competition with Rome, then or now, but with the vision of a Kingdom greater than Rome: God's Kingdom—a kingdom of love and service, not of terror and violence.

Let's fulfill our calling to love and serve God and humanity. That is Jesus' way, and as followers of Jesus, it is our way. Let your love and passion bring healing change to our wonderful world.