

Natalie W. Bell
January 25, 2026

Follow Me
Matthew 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

¹³ *Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—* ¹⁴ *to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*

¹⁵ *“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”* ¹⁶

¹⁷ *From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

¹⁸ *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.* ¹⁹ *“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”* ²⁰ *At once they left their nets and followed him.*

²¹ *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,* ²² *and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

Follow me, and I will make you fish for people

Even people that don't know the Bible know this phrase.

Everyone knows the images that go with it too.

The fishing poles, hooks, anchors, boats...the ichthus fish....

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.

But what does this really ***mean***?

What does it mean to ***YOU***?

***Does God really want us baiting, hooking, and reeling people
into the kingdom of God?***

People are not fish!

We don't want to 'catch' people against their will for God's kingdom, do we?

But, we ***DO want everyone to know Jesus—***

and be a part of God's kingdom.

So what is Jesus ***REALLY saying to us today?***

First, I think we have to remember that it would have been highly ***unusual*** for a teacher, a Rabbi at that time to come along and say 'follow me' to potential students!

Back then students sought out their teachers or rabbis.

Here Jesus is seeking out his own students, and disciples!

So THAT would have ***caught people's attention.***

And then what ***he SAYS is unusual*** too.

I will make you fish...for people?

Why would he say THAT?

Our best guess is that he did it because these guys were ***fishermen—***

And their way of life was on the sea!

So wouldn't it make sense for Jesus to tell them

that he would make them ***fish for something else, like people?***

After all, their lives were all about fishing.

I was reading about this passage,

and how the sea is a place of CHAOS in the Bible.....

so what if Jesus was offering them a RESCUE from the chaos of the world?

Into a new way of life, in the kingdom of God?

Think about that...Jesus was giving them a new opportunity, for a new kind of life!

But what if they had all been ***DOCTORS?***

Would he have made them healers of souls?

What if they had been ***carpenters?***

Would they be called to be builders of the kingdom?

Isn't it possible that the invitation was specific to their circumstance?

Whatever their calling, whatever their gifts,

What if that's how Jesus wanted them to LIVE OUT their faith?

I wonder if the point is that Jesus is calling them to ***FOLLOW?***
 But to do it with what ***they HAVE,***
what they KNOW, and ***who they ARE.***

And what if---what if the ***same thing is true for US*** today?

What if we are called to follow Jesus, and ***be who we are***---
 But with what we ***HAVE,***
what we KNOW,
who we ARE.

Let's just imagine that God is calling ***US to follow Jesus*** in ways
 that we understand.

Ways that are familiar to us.

Following God is not designed to be crazy.

What if we don't have to become something or someone we aren't?
 What if ***we are already equipped*** to follow, and do ministry?
 Isn't that ***part of who we are as CHILDREN of God?***

We sometimes think people ***being called*** to follow God,
 Is for someone else.

But God calls ***EVERY ONE of us***---
 To follow, in our ***own unique way!***
 This means we are free to be the ***best we can be***,
 to bring ***our gifts and talents*** to serve God.

***Do you realize that in the Presbyterian tradition,
 Every single person is a MINISTER?***

all members of the church are ministers!

This comes from Paul's writing about the priesthood of all believers.
 That's us!

It ***doesn't matter*** who we are, where we live, what our age or stage of life,
 We have what it takes to follow Jesus, and minister!
 right ***where*** we are, right ***who*** we are, right ***now!***

Did you notice HOW the first disciples decided to follow Jesus?

It says they followed Him---Immediately.

They left everything right then.

Can you imagine?

I've always wondered if that ***was about their excitement?***
 Like they heard something they'd been ***waiting to hear their whole lives?***
 What if they recognized the voice of God in Jesus' voice,
 and wanted to follow—right away?

And, what if Jesus asks US for that kind of ***response?***
 That when we hear a holy nudge,
 We respond—right away!

So often we are ***so BUSY with our own lives,***
 That we don't take time to respond to the little nudges from God.

When was the last time you paid attention to a holy nudge?
 You know---To call someone?
 To visit?
 To send a note or a card?

Pastors joke that ***ministry happens in the INTERRUPTIONS...***
 because we never know when God will ask us to stop
 and do something we hadn't planned!
 But isn't that true—***for ALL of us?***
 Have you ever been really busy with one thing,
 and something else comes up that's even more important?
 What if that's God?

As we think about following Jesus,
 Think about this----
We already have all the skills we need to follow Him!
 And, as we follow Him,
 We actually ***become more*** of who we were created to be!

One Methodist Pastor put it this way:
BE who you are.
SEE what you have.
And DO what matters.
 (congregationaltransformation.com, ctblog; Nov 30, 2009)

Stop and think about that.

BE who you are.

SEE what you have.

And DO what matters.

What does that look like in your life--today?

Jesus says, Follow me, and I will make you.....

what will Jesus make YOU?

And what if, this call to Follow—

it's ***not just something else we add to our already long 'to do' list***

What if Jesus wants to ***use our lives,***

whatever we're ***ALREADY doing,***

where we are ***ALREADY going,***

And in doing that....***we become who we're meant to be!***

I believe that sometimes following Jesus is pretty basic....

It might mean having a simple conversation,

or offering help to a friend,

or extending a welcome,

just opening your life for someone else--- In a place and time you ***already are.***

***Is there someone at your office that you've felt a nudge
about talking to or inviting to lunch?***

***Is there someone in church who has been on your heart
that you should reach out to?***

Are there people you know who need food, or a ride? Or a listening ear?

How is God calling YOU to say or Do something?

***Have you seen or heard anything lately that touches your heart—
and you need to respond?***

This is how ministry works—for all of us.

People are touched by something—a tragedy, a story, a person, a need, and they respond.

How are YOU being asked to respond?

How WE as a church being asked to respond?

One of the most exciting aspects of this new year as ONE congregation,
 Is utilizing some of the generous financial gifts of LPC.
 The monies from the sale of LPC are in two buckets for us to use,
 according to our agreement with Presbytery.

One bucket is for current and new MISSIONS.

We will use interest from this fund
 to do new and exciting things to serve our community.
 Session and Deacons have already made some goals:
 Like helping people with food insecurity, and reaching out to families.
 This means we could expand the ministry of the food pantry,
 And expand our outreach to families in new and exciting ways!
 We have a great team working on this!

Another bucket is for CAPITAL projects.

We are working on ***a Master Plan*** of projects that help our building
 become more safe, and more accessible to all people.
 This includes things like a better parking lot and an elevator!
 But other projects will be prioritized
 as we use the interest from this fund each year.

This is so exciting for us as a united congregation.

Just imagine the things we can do as we follow Jesus' voice, together!

As you think about following His voice----

What do you hear Jesus saying to you?

Is he saying, follow me, with your gifts of ***generosity*?**

With your artistic talents?

With your ***hospitality, compassion, justice, or love?***

Is Jesus saying---***you survived something incredible***---
 now help others do the same!

Or is he saying you've been ***touched by a tragedy***—
 Now you can be there for others?

We ALL have the opportunity to follow Him,

in our own ways, in our own lives.

And what if in following Jesus---

We find TRUE JOY?

One of my favorite authors and Pastors,

Barbara Brown Taylor,

talks about a time when she was struggling with her sense of call.

She could not figure out what it was that God wanted her to do and be.

Did God want her to be a writer? a priest? a social worker? A teacher?

She didn't know!

And in her frustration, one midnight, she fell down on her knees in prayer and said:

"Okay, God. You need to level with me. What do you want me to be?"

"What do you want me to do?"

She said she felt a very powerful response,

It was God saying,

"Do what PLEASES you. Belong to me, but do what pleases you."

She said it struck her as very strange that God's call

could be that place of her greatest joy,

that she could be called to do the thing that pleases her the most!

But it actually makes sense!

Following Jesus is about ***finding our JOY.***

Thomas Long, "Where You Never Expected to Be", Program #5004, 30 Good Minutes, First air date October 22, 2006.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that 'follow me' is a call to 'absolute discipleship'.

He said only in surrendering ourselves to this call do we find our ***greatest JOY.***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship. NY: Touchstone, 1995, pg. 37-38.

Another Christian writer and Presbyterian Pastor, Frederick ***Buechner*** said,

"Our calling is where our deepest JOY, and the world's HUNGER meet."

Howard Thurman, African-American author, and civil rights leader said,

Don't (just) ask what the world needs.

Ask what makes you COME ALIVE, and GO DO IT!

Because what the world needs, is people to come alive!

Friends—following Jesus,

Is all about ***Finding joy---and Coming Alive!*** Hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel today: Jesus is calling US to Follow---whoever we are, wherever we are, with whatever we have.

And He will ***make us MORE ALIVE*** than we ever dreamed possible, and help us find our ***JOY.***

And for that Good news, all God's people say together, Amen!