

February 2, 2020 – Matthew 4:18-22

What Would It Take To Get You Away From Your Boat?

We thank the Lord for bringing Pastor Porinsky to guest preach.

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

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For about four years or so, my boat sat in Neil Luckhardt’s garage. When Neil moved he delivered it back to the parsonage of Faith Lutheran Church in Dexter Township, and it sat in my backyard for several more years. I think I used it about four times in about eight or nine years, and only *once* in the last six years. Since I retired on a little lake on the north side of Howell, however, the boat and I have become inseparable. How attached am I to my boat? So attached that I can tell you what happens when you’re fishing with a casting lure and the air temperature is below freezing: As the water drips off the line when you’re reeling your lure in, it freezes in little cylinders in the guides of your fishing rod, and eventually your reel is so coated in ice that you cannot cast any longer. **What Would it Take to Get Me Away from My Boat?** A lot. I was out in my boat the end of November even when 95% of my lake was frozen over. I was out in my boat 8 of the first 15 days in January.

What Would it Take to Get You Away from Your Boat? For some avid fishermen, quite a lot. There are many who, like me, can hardly be torn away, summer or winter.

Jesus succeeded. He succeeded in tearing *professional* fishermen away from their boats. These men were not just catching and releasing black bass, but they were fishing for their *livelihood*. Today we take a look at Jesus’ Epiphany, His revelation and calling of four disciples by the Sea of Galilee.

A lot has been made of the fact that these four were fishermen. Often the adjective “unlearned” is used, and certainly they were not college grads. But they were by no means unintelligent, nor were they unacquainted with their Bible; and they do not appear to have been financially poor: St. Mark talks about Zebedee’s “hired men,” which implies a somewhat profitable family fishing business.

This was apparently not the first time Jesus had met these same disciples. In John chapter 1, John the Baptist pointed two of them to Jesus, and they had gone with Him for awhile, maybe even a few months. They had witnessed His first miracles. But then, apparently, Jesus had sent them back to their boats. They resumed being fishermen for awhile. Now He calls them a second time.

Today, too, that often happens in the church; Jesus often calls individual members to some special act of service or training, and for a while they are so busy they hardly have time to take care of their own affairs.

After a time like that, the Lord often gives people a little bit of a break, a little more breathing room, so they can catch up on their work at home, and at their job – and also so they can *reflect* on His work for them.

Then, after a somewhat more slack time, they are ready to heed His call again. In the disciples' case this second call seems to have been more or less permanent, though there seem to have been periods when Jesus functioned without them.

The call Jesus extends is, "Come, follow Me." It was not unusual for a Jewish rabbi in those days to summon disciples in this way. It might seem foreign to us. Maybe we all too often give the impression that being a Christian means: "Come, sit through 6-8 years of Sunday School classes and a couple years of confirmation classes, and then become a communicant member of the congregation." In Bible times you would literally, physically, *follow* the rabbi, for several years – like a group of interns following a head doctor around from room to room at the U of M Hospital, or apprentices in a skilled trades program. Disciples would observe, and sometimes carry out the rabbi's instructions. It would be great to do that today, and in some professions we still do. But in church, as well as in formal schooling, we miss this. Just do not forget, though, that being a disciple, being a Christian, means following a *person* – not just learning doctrines and Bible passages, but having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now please do not accuse me of downplaying doctrines or learning; just ask any catechism student that I instructed. I am aware that one religious sect after another has stressed "following Jesus" without giving doctrinal support, and this produces enthusiasm for a time, but no positive lasting results. A person must be grounded in Bible teaching, and every single Bible teaching points to Jesus. Just remember, though, that head learning is not an end in itself. Your calling is, "Follow Jesus."

And "at once," "immediately," the Bible says, the disciples did follow Jesus. In the case of James and John the description is very graphic: "They left the boat and their father and followed Him." Just like that. The nets they were working on they never got to use. What made them do it? Was the fishing not very good? Well, we suspect this might have been the time they had fished all night and caught nothing (Luke 5:5). Were they maybe getting bored with the whole business? But what did Jesus have to offer? No riches or glory, not even a place to lay His head. He had already had a brush with the authorities, and the disciples knew that. Yet they were willing to take a chance.

In their short time with Him they had seen something. They had seen Jesus do things, including, perhaps, provide a great catch of fish on this occasion. But they had seen more: There was something about *Him*, and their willingness to follow on such short notice says more about Him than about them. He must have been a dynamic Person, radiating so much power and love, that they were compelled to go with Him; all other claims on them, even their parents' claims, lost all validity.

I would like to think that we would react the same way. We have never met Jesus – and yet we *have*. That is why we are here. And though we have never heard Him speak with our ears or seen Him with our eyes, we know what He has done – how He laid down His life because of our sins, and was raised again because of our justification (Romans 4:25). We know the claim He has on us: He bought us with His blood. He owns us. And He still says, "Come, follow Me."

One Bible scholar wrote that since Jesus left the earth and His presence became spiritual, "all occasion for such nomadic discipleship was done away. To be present with Him thereafter, men needed only to forsake their sins."

There is some truth in that, but not entirely. When Jesus says “Come, follow Me,” that might still be a call to “nomadic discipleship,” *going* somewhere, *leaving* something, and not just your sins. Ask any foreign missionary. Or ask my family 350 miles from here and my wife’s family 550 miles away: Would we have come to Michigan, and stayed 41 years, if we did not see that call from Faith Lutheran Church in 1978 and honestly believe that through it Jesus was saying, “Come, follow Me”? Every *one* of us has been called to follow Him: Maybe you would not be in your marriage, your job, your house, except that you believe Jesus told you, “Come, follow Me.” Maybe you would not be living the moral life that you *are* living.

In the case of some of you, He might even be calling you into full-time service as a pastor or Lutheran school teacher, or at least service as a Church Council member or a Ladies Aid officer. If this is the case, you will not be totally happy or successful anywhere else. It is always possible to resist His call, but remember on the Last Day everything else will be shown to be a detour. The bottom line is that people are dying and going either to heaven or hell. The question for *every* Christian, whether you are a called worker or not, is, “How does Jesus want *me* to follow Him?” That is the only way to be in the mainstream. If you are doing anything but what He calls you to do, you are on a side street, or in an alley, and you are missing out on the action. Your ultimate calling, like the disciples, is to be a fisher of men – to catch people with the bait of Jesus’ Gospel, and in this way to give them eternal life.

Jesus called four fishermen: “Come, follow Me.” And look what He accomplished through those four. We cannot hope to accomplish as much, but it is every bit as vital that we follow Him. He has done just as much for us: He has forgiven our sins and given us each a place in heaven. We have seen His miracles in the Bible, and heard His call.

I would love to spend every waking minute in my boat out on my little lake; but I know that is not my real calling. So I *do* get away from my boat, even in great weather when the fish are biting.

You are here today because Jesus has managed to get you away from *your* boat – whatever boat that might be: Your recreation, or a particular way of earning a livelihood, or just sitting in your comfortable house this morning with a cup of coffee reading your newspaper or playing on your tablet or phone. That is no easy task, getting you away from that, but Jesus managed to do it in your case, because He convinced you of His love and His power; He convinced you that there is no substitute for the eternal life He has to give you.

Once, Jesus even got Peter away from his boat in the midst of a stormy lake and had him walk on water. If you know Jesus and trust in Him, you are compelled to follow Him *wherever* He leads you.