

Mark 1:14-20 [NIV]

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

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

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

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I can't help but laugh at verse 16 there, where we're told Simon and Andrew were casting Annette into the lake. I wonder what Annette thought about that.

We'll just get that out of the way right off the bat!

Although Jesus was and still is, of course, many, many things, what we've been considering together is Jesus' extraordinary ability to *provoke*. Jesus was able to cause very different responses from different people by the things He said, the things He did, His manner and values and assessments. Sometimes just His *presence* provoked reaction from people.

He was a remarkably provocative person – which is why I'm calling Jesus a *provocateur*.

In the apostle John's account of the wedding at Cana that we read a few weeks ago, we saw how Jesus provoked, in His mother, a response of immense trust. Mary had no idea how Jesus was going to fix the lack-of-wine problem, but somehow, she knew that whatever He did would be the best thing that could possibly be done, which is why she told the servants at the wedding there, "*Do whatever He tells you.*"

Jesus is a provocateur of trust in some hearts.

The next week, we found, in Matthew 8, Jesus provoking a deep sense of *humility* in a Centurion who'd asked Him to heal a member of his household. That soldier knew, and admitted, that he didn't *deserve anything* from Jesus – that anything Jesus did for him was simply grace, and Jesus praised him for that recognition and his rare, rare humility.

Today's passage tells us about Jesus' calling of His first disciples, and frankly, there are lots of things that are interesting about this. There are lots of things here that really deserve their own sermons. For example:

The fact that Jesus did the inviting here – Jesus invited these guys to follow Him. That's opposite from the way Jewish students followed Jewish teachers, the rabbis of that day. It was always the students who asked the rabbi to teach them. But here, it's Jesus who initiates. This would have caught them by surprise.

Also, look at the students that Jesus chose – four fishermen! That would have been shocking!

I don't mean to demean fishermen, certainly. It's just that in that day most students of rabbis were already somewhat educated. They were students of the Jewish law, and typically were not people who worked with their hands.

Yet Jesus chooses entirely different people, showing us here that it's not just education that makes a person; it's the sort of education a person has. Really, it's who a person follows and models their life after that really makes a difference.

There's a huge principle to be explored, right there.

Something else we see here is that Jesus' call to these guys was a call to *Himself*. It was a call to follow *Him* – to follow a *person*.

You see, Jesus didn't call people to follow some theological or philosophical *system*, or to a *doctrine*, or to a *moral code* – to some *document* or *principle* written down somewhere.

Now, that's not to say those things aren't important; they are, and they have their place.

But you see, Jesus asks people to follow – *Him*. Jesus asks people to follow a living, breathing, communicative, engageable, offendable, and everything-else-that-a-person-is, *person*.

You get to Christianity by following Jesus Christ.

That's important for, I think, especially American Christians to remember, because we tend to assume that our *non-Christian friends* – actually we tend to think our whole post-Christian country – should *want* to, or at least be *willing* to, sign on to the Christian way, the Christian ethos, the Christian morality.

We very often try to force people into our theology or philosophy or doctrine before they ever have a relationship with Jesus, and you see, that's all backward. That's never going to work.

We're not going to have much luck getting anyone to say "yes" to the faith and belief system and the moral code of Christianity if they don't first say "yes" to Jesus, the person, and engage in a real relationship with Him.

That's why, in the end, there is no real political or legislative answer to what ails our nation today. I mean, we do what we can along those lines, but the fact is, you can't make people who don't know Jesus want Jesus' stuff, Jesus' standards, Jesus' ways.

That's why He began not by reforming government, but by inviting individual persons to Himself.

And, that's why He told them, right from the start, "Follow me, and I'll turn you fishermen into *fishers of men.*"

There's another thing that deserves its own sermon: the fact that implicit in any real relationship with Jesus is a *task*.

You see, Jesus was task-oriented, in that way. He never invites people to just some aimless existence or static state of being. Jesus invites people to a *purpose* – to share, in fact, in *His* purpose.

It's right there in His invitation, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" If we really follow Him, this is what we become. You can't have Jesus without having Jesus' purpose and coming to adopt all that is His as our own.

This is especially driven home in these verses, because the Greek verb here for "follow," *akoloutheo*, is a strong word. It is used only in the gospels, other than one time in Revelation, and it means the kind of following which makes all other ties and relationships secondary.

That's what Jesus is asking here, and that's why those He invited just got up and left everything else behind.

This is an invitation to a far more radical sort of discipleship than most think – a relationship where Jesus comes first, and everything else, as James and John here show us, comes second. They leave their work, their possessions, even their father – their family – in order to follow Jesus.

Which is really the sermon I want to preach today. I want to talk about what Jesus provoked in these four men – the willingness to *akoloutheo* – to *follow* in such a way that made Jesus their priority over everything – *everything* else.

Some people wonder if, with these guys just getting up and walking away, Jesus put them in some sort of miraculous trance.

Others wonder if this was Jesus' first encounter with those guys, or if they'd seen Jesus around before.

Personally, I believe the trance thing is really not consistent with Jesus' character.

And, we really can't know for sure, I don't think, about the second.

But you see, there was something that these men saw in Jesus that captured them completely. Jesus took hold of their imaginations, their plans, their dreams, their purposes – their whole lives.

Jesus provoked in them, not just some casual agreement, but *complete devotion*, to the point that, when He called them, they just left. They left.

Now, that doesn't mean they left without responsibly caring for matters. James and John left their father, it's true, but they didn't leave him alone. They left him with the hired hands that were there fishing with them.

So, it's not a careless or unloving leaving that's demonstrated here.

But it is a drastic, yet faith-filled, leaving that Jesus calls for, and that these men demonstrate. It's the leaving of past means of support, of familiar places and practices, of a certain lifestyle, of life pattern and schedule, and of loved family members.

And while it's true that all of these don't necessarily apply equally to every person Jesus calls, truly following Jesus does make any and all of them possible.

The truth is, we usually don't know for sure what following Jesus will mean, until we say "yes," but all that is our lives has to be on the table in order to say that "yes."

That's why a person who depends on their own ability to plan the future has trouble following Jesus like this.

It's why people who like to be in control have trouble following Jesus.

It's why people who are stuck to schedules, or who are inflexible in their patterns, or who are married to their stuff, have trouble really following Jesus like this.

Because as these fishermen show us, following Jesus – really following Jesus in the total sense, the *akoloutheo* sense always requires leaving something.

That's what Jesus asks of His disciples. He provokes the confidence and trust to leave: to leave something that is merely adequate in order to gain something that is truly excellent; to leave something that is temporal for something – for *someone* – who is eternal.

I wonder if Jesus is walking by our lakeshore here today and calling some of us to leave, in order to follow Him – to really follow Him – more completely?

Is He calling some here:

to leave a place,

to leave a standard of living,

to leave a perspective – a way of thinking,

to leave a career, a dream, maybe a relationship,

to leave some expectation of the future?

Is Jesus asking you to follow Him in this more complete way?

He's asking because He wants to take you somewhere that is eternally significant – and give you something to do that will make a cosmic difference in the world. He wants to use us all to accomplish His will through us – to put us in places where we can be fishers of men too.

If Jesus is, in some way, asking you to follow Him today, as we come to His table, why don't you do as Andrew and Peter and James and John did here and just say "yes" – and leave whatever it is that's coming between you and following Jesus completely?

Prayer

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *I Have Decided*

Benediction:

May the Lord provoke, and the Spirit empower in us all, the willingness and the ability to leave – to leave behind anything that might keep us from getting up and following Jesus with all that we are wherever He might lead.