

“Are you Willing To Follow?”

Matthew 4:12-23

In 1870, at the Indiana Methodist Annual Conference, the presiding Bishop was asking a group for an interpretation of current events. The president of the college where the conference was held volunteered his input: "I think we are living in a very exciting age. I believe we are coming into a time when we will see wonderful inventions. I believe we will fly through the air like birds!"

Bishop Wright, visibly disturbed by this scientifically based comment proclaimed, "This is heresy, this is blasphemy; I read in my Bible that flight is reserved for the birds and the angels. We will not have such talk here in my Episcopal area." Bishop Wright then returned home to his two young sons, Orville and Wilbur. (source: www.sermoncentral.com)

Change...so often we're afraid of what it might bring but yet when we look at the world around us...we don't want them to stay the same either. We pray for peace in a time of war. We pray for health in a time of sickness. We pray for wealth in the midst of poverty. We pray for guidance in the midst of indecision. We pray for hope in the midst of darkness, faith in the midst of fear, and love in the midst of hate.

There is no doubt we want the change...but the transformation from our status quo, our comfort zone, is often the most uncomfortable feeling in the world.

Jesus knew that the people were ready for the change he was about to bring. John the Baptist had drawn crowds upon crowds, and now with him in prison, they cried out for more. And it was then, after His baptism, and after His temptation, that the ministry of Jesus Christ began...it began with the disciples. Soon they were going to have an encounter with Jesus. And it was going to be an encounter with life changing results! The scripture today is all about the calling of the disciples. And their discipleship and ours also is all about an encounter with Jesus. Revivals, camp meetings, retreats, Emmaus Walks, even concerts are all about encounters with Jesus Christ and the grace he offers.

Jesus was walking along the seashore and he saw Simon and his brother casting their net into the sea. Jesus in a very simple, yet direct way, spoke to them and said, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Now, there must have been something about these words or something about the tone of Jesus' voice because, *“they laid down their nets and followed Jesus.”*

And as he went a little farther, and saw James and his brother John in a boat preparing their nets, and called them in the same manner and they too left their boat and nets and their father and followed Jesus.

Consider this encounter: No warning, no previous thoughts about a career change and a life change. These four men, unlikely characters, were called by Jesus to be a disciple. Discipleship begins with an encounter somewhere along life's journey. To be a Christian one must have an encounter with Jesus, and experience with Jesus Christ.

Out of this encounter comes the meaning and mission of life. What Jesus offered to them was something different...what Jesus offered them was a chance...a chance that would lead to a change that would never allow those disciples to be the same again. A chance that would lead to a change that would forever change the world... All with two simple words... *“follow me.”*

Christ encounters us as we are: So many times we have thoughts that Jesus Christ can't or won't use us or need us until we change a few things in our life. These fishermen turned disciples were ordinary people doing the work that they did to earn a living. When they had this encounter, there was not time to go make some changes... *Jesus wants as we are.*

Christ encounters us where we are: Who would think that Jesus Christ would choose some fishermen for his disciples? Who would think that Jesus would want factory workers or high school students or teachers or bankers or military people or lawyers or doctors or dentists or housewives or children or retired folks to be his disciples? Jesus Christ comes to where we are doing what we do. (casting. mending)

Christ encounters us for what we can be: He called those four to be fishers of men. Jesus Christ still looks today for men, women, boys and girls, teens to follow him. What is most important in our response? *Are we willing to follow?*

For these four men and for many others who have followed Jesus and for us today, Jesus words “follow me” “is a test of trust”. Can you trust Jesus? Are you willing to follow? In my days of doing school related Outdoor Education programs and even in some of our church camps. We engaged in trust building activities. After a day of being together, I would often take the campers on a hike at night. While at first it sounded a little adventurous, it became even more so when I announced that only two people could have a flashlight...the leader and the end person. That fun filled walk at night becomes a test of trust...trust in me as their leader.

Are you willing to follow Jesus? Are you willing to trust Jesus?

For Jesus the time had come to begin his ministry. For Simon, Andrew, James and John it was time to begin following Jesus. Christian discipleship begin with Jesus calling us to follow him. There is no need for hesitation...follow these four men's example... *immediately they began to follow him.*

John Bell wrote a song that touched my heart the first time I heard it:

Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known...
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind, if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same.
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will let the blinded see, if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen?
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Jesus calls us to *repentance*...a very transformational experience...Jesus calls us to *immediacy*...for He knows that time is short...Jesus calls us to *ministry*...because “the kingdom of heaven” is at hand...

Jesus offers us the change of following him...it's the offer that only Christ can offer...it's the offer that we must accept for ourselves...it's the offer once taken that will change our lives forever...indeed, we will never be the same...

You may be at a point where you're ready for the first time to follow...Jesus is waiting for your answer. You may be at a point where you've told Jesus before that you'd follow, but you find yourself side-tracked...Jesus with all grace and mercy is waiting for you to follow again.

The disciples accepted and followed. Jesus offered them a chance to repent, to immediately leave the status quo behind, and to be in ministry with him...simply by following.... **Praise God that offer still stands!**