

A SERMON FOR JANUARY 22, 2023
THIRD SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY

They left their father Zebedee in the boat. Matthew 4;12-23

Last Sunday we heard about John the Baptist developing an understanding of Jesus' true identity and then declaring him publically "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Two of his disciples hearing him say this of Jesus left John and followed Jesus. He turned and said, "What are you looking for?" The two responded, "Where are you staying?" Jesus then issued a personal invitation to them with his answer, "Come, and see." Those two men did so and spent the entire day listening to Jesus and his teachings. This Sunday continues the narrative with Jesus the calling of his first followers who would eventually change the whole world.

This day was like all the other days - except for the Sabbath, of course. Andrew and his brother Peter awoke before dawn, arose and rolled up their sleeping mats. They put on their tunics, took a small loaf of bread from its storage place by the oven and quietly left the house. They walked through the streets of Capernaum the short distance to the shore of the lake we know as the Sea of Galilee. They went to their boat and stowed their lunch loaf under the storage space at the bow. The two then gathered the circular net they kept there overnight and carried it with them as they waded carefully into the shallows of the lake. The two then threw the net into the water and began to try their luck for the day. It was there by the seaside that Jesus found Peter and Andrew casting their net into the sea. It was there that he issued his invitation, "Follow me!" Peter and Andrew accepted the invitation and their lives were changed forever.

James and John and their father Zebedee had followed the same routine as Peter and Andrew, that day and every day, except for the Sabbath of course, when they attended services at the synagogue, and later relaxed visiting friends and relatives. This particular day James and John were mending their nets in their boat that was also in the shallow water. Jesus, walking nearby on the shore, hailed them and said, "Follow me!" Immediately, the two brothers hopped over the gunwale of their boat and into the ankle deep water and made their way to where Jesus stood

waiting. They accepted Jesus' invitation - and their lives were changed forever.

How many times have you heard that story. Innumerable times, I bet. Have you ever wondered why Zebedee didn't come along - why he didn't accept the invitation to "Follow me!"

Perhaps he thought he wasn't invited. But it seems doubtful that any of these could be the reason Zebedee did not join Jesus because it is not consistent with the rest of the Gospel. We know that **all** are invited and **all** are welcomed into fellowship with Jesus.

Or maybe his life's dream was to expand his business - buy a bigger boat or have two boats and hire some more men to run the operation. He'd be too busy to run off somewhere with the itinerant Rabbi.

Or, maybe he was afraid - afraid of something new. Afraid to take a chance. Why risk it?

Whatever the reason, the bottom line is - Zebedee remained in the boat - secure in his routine - comfortable in his ways - clinging to the familiar. He was unwilling to follow Jesus. And so - Zebedee remained in his boat.

- What does it mean to follow Jesus? What does it imply when we say "I am a Christian." What do we mean when we say I am a follower of Jesus, the Son of the God of Love?
- At the very least it means we have, at one time or another, accepted the call of Jesus to us in baptism.
- . It means we are aware of and try to follow his teachings as he outlined them in the *Sermon on the Mount*.
- It means we set aside a time in our life to help others.
- It means we are a people of prayer, who set aside time each day to talk to the God of Love, expressing our needs and desires for ourselves and on behalf of others.
- It means we come to a gathering of the church community each week for the refreshment of the Lord's Supper. For hearing the Gospel account of Jesus life

and of his teachings.

- It means we will tell others, through our words and actions, what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ.
- It means we will think and act, constantly remembering the way Jesus thought and acted in his life, always mindful of the needs of others.

Whenever Jesus calls us to follow, he is offering us a new way of abundant living. Following Jesus into the way of righteousness and in accord with the God of Love's rule of life makes us one with him, with the Creator and with his Spirit. Living in that condition brings us God's peace; freedom and peace. And we must accept some measure of risk. We have the opportunity to accept, to jump into the surf and meet with him and follow him in that abundant life. We can refuse the invitation and hold ourselves back from what we were meant to become. When we refuse, attached to the familiar and the secure, even when it is the Son of God beckoning from the shore, we become like Zebedee who remained in the boat that day.

Jesus calls us to join him in ministry countless times during our lives. We do not know what happened to Zebedee or how he responded the next time Jesus called. Scripture does not tell us. We do know that despite their initial enthusiasm and acceptance of the invitation to join Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James and John were far from perfect followers. The same is true of each one of us. Sometimes we are up to the task: but other times we are not. However, because we have said 'yes' once to Jesus, the adventure has begun for us and our lives have been changed forever.

When Jesus calls he beckons us beyond the point of familiarity and into a grand interpersonal relationship. When he calls us he may be asking us to risk doing something we don't really know how to do – or do not want to do. He invites us to become someone we're not yet sure we know how to become. In the end though, it is not just that we are taking a chance on Jesus. Each and every time he calls, Jesus is taking a chance on us. Our baptismal vows demand that we accept the invitation and drop our nets and do his bidding.

I invite you think on these things.

Let us pray: Almighty God, you have commissioned us at our Baptism to respond to the call of your Christ: Grant us your grace that without fear or hesitation, we may readily follow your Son's call whenever he bids us come; we ask in the name of that same Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

The Rev. Robert H. Brown Church of the Messiah Gwynedd, PA January 22, 2023