

Matthew 4:12-23
Follow Me
January 22nd, 2017

The assumption I am working with today is that to “Follow Jesus” means that we are seeking to become like Jesus. We are extending a hand up to him to be drawn up to be more like him every day, and we are extending a hand behind us to help others on their way.



A pastor friend of mine named Nate Holt used to train seminary students how to be pastors and preach. He had one particular student who was working on preaching. His first big day in the pulpit the student stood up, put his hand up in the air and then bent his ring finger straight out like this.... And then he began to preach.

Afterward Nate critiqued the sermon and then asked, “Why did you put your hand up in the air and bend your finger down.” The student replied, “Well that’s what I have seen you do; so I did it too.”

Nate was a bit surprised and humbled that this young man studied him so closely, but then had to gently tell this young man that he bent his finger forward because it was permanently stuck that way. He had a condition called Dupuytren's contracture.

Someone is always watching us. From the front we look like sheep



and from the back we look like shepherds.



There are many ways to follow Jesus. There are many ways we can model our lives after Jesus, but today this scripture passage lifts three up: **proclaiming, teaching and healing**. The point here is that we need to become like Jesus, we need to follow Jesus by doing; by living out these three things.



The background for this passage is that it begins with John the Baptist being thrown into prison. We met John the Baptist last week revealing Jesus as the Lamb of God and encouraging Andrew and Peter to follow him. This week, at Jesus' invitation, they do just that.

This crisis of John being imprisoned is the impetus for Jesus beginning his public ministry. Crisis often moves us to turn to follow God or repent. Another way of saying it is we decide to stop wandering around lost in this world and turn to follow Jesus to find our direction in life when things go from bad to worst. We go from wandering in the woods to following the pathway to God.



At this point in his life and ministry Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth never to return. He went to Capernaum on the North Side of lake Galilee to fulfill the prophecy that a great light, the Light of the World in fact, had dawned on them.

Then comes the one sentence summary, the Readers Digest version of his message, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

It was the time, the perfect time, God's time, Kairos time for his ministry and message to come into the light of the world. It was decision time.

As I said, "Last week John the Baptist revealed Jesus to be the Lamb of God and encouraged two disciples to follow him." This week they follow him. They begin to receive the gift of faith and step into the good works that God had prepared for them to do. They had to make that decision. As fisherman say about times of decision, "It's time to fish or cut bait." They decided to fish, fish for people.

Off and on I have talked about the concept of "People of Peace." This is an example of that concept as well as the events of last week's scripture. One person who is a believer meets another person, they connect, and then the believer, both invites the other person into their life, and are invited into the other person's life.

Andrew and Peter were brothers and had a familial connection, as did James and Zebedee. Last week it was Andrew who first found Jesus at John the Baptist's direction, and then he invited his brother Peter to meet Jesus. It is in relationship that we come into a relationship with Jesus.

We connect with People of Peace and through time and patience and understanding we invite them into a connection with God through Christ. Sometimes it works best with relatives and sometimes our relatives are the last ones on earth we could ever invite.

There is a man who appears on the corner of Wilmot and Broadway off and on. He usually is carrying a sign he holds out for the passing cars to see. Sometimes the sign will say, "Jesus saves." Sometimes it says, "God loves you." Around Christmas it said something like, "Jesus is the reason for the season."

It is a brave witness. These are all true statements, but I don't think he really connects with the passing motorists enough to bring any of them into a relationship with Jesus.

But I believe God does bring into our lives People of Peace that we can connect with, and with the patience of a fisherman bring them into a relationship with God. I call these People of Peace as a group **FRAN: Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, and Neighbors.**

People of Peace are people that God brings into our lives or they are already in our lives forever (like relatives) and it is through a connection with them that we connect them with God. I have told you about my friend Jack. I met him walking one day. The first time I met him, like most men, we tell each other what we do. I told him I was a pastor. He told me he was an atheist. He actually was a retired divorce lawyer, but they deal with enough animosity to become atheists.

Anyway, we connected for some reason. Politically and religiously we were in 2 different worlds, but with the patience of a “fisher of people” I continued to walk with him 2 or 3 times a week for about 5 years and we talked about everything including God. Our last regular walk together he declared that he believed in God after 5 years. Others have met People of Peace walking and in grocery stores, rotary clubs, card clubs etc etc.



So, how do you follow Jesus and do what Jesus did? How do you proclaim, teach and heal. How do you reach for God and reach back to pull someone up, which is what this Bible story encourages?

First, let's look at **Proclaim**. This word comes from the Greek word for a King's Herold bringing a clear message from the King. The Herold would share the message he heard from the Master. He would share what he was certain of because it came from the Master, the King. There would be no doubt or hesitation in what he said, because he was certain that that was the message. Jesus proclaimed the word he heard from God. As the people said, **“He spoke as one who had authority.”**
He spoke the words of God.

To proclaim the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ simple share what you are certain of. Share what you know in your heart of hearts is true. Don't be drawn off into side arguments and discussions. If all you know and experienced is that God loves you, share that. God is love. You don't have to defend the creation stories versus the Big Bang Theory, or other sticky doctrinal issues. You just need to share what you are certain of.

There is a German Poet named Goethe who wrote, "Tell me of your certainties: I have enough doubts of my own." Barkley Matt. Vol 1 p. 87

Second, let's look at **Teach**. The best way of thinking about teaching besides teaching a Bible Study or Sunday School class is **living out what you are certain of** in your life. If you are certain God loves us and wants us to live a life of love, then live a life of love. If you are certain of your salvation, live a life risk and faith not fear.

Third, let's look at **Heal**. Certainly Jesus had in mind physical healing. As he went about the country he physically healed hundreds if not thousands. He calls us to pray over the sick and anoint them with oil, and by doing this I have seen people healed. But healing has a wider reach than eliminating a disease. In fact, the word often used when Jesus healed someone physically, also had the connotation of forgiveness. Jesus, when he healed, healed both body and soul!

In the Great Commission which was part of our countdown Matt 28:16-20 Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me so go..." In that phrase the connotation and implication is that Jesus has given us the same authority, the same commission, the same command, the same permission to proclaim, teach, baptize and even heal. So as we follow Jesus we go out into the world. As we follow Jesus we reach out our hand to another.

And we can heal people in this world in so many ways. To the battered and abused we can offer kindness. To those in pain and abandoned we can offer compassion. To the unloved and unwanted we can offer love. To the guilt ridden and those caught in shame we can offer forgiveness. And for all we can point to the forgiveness that comes

through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. These are ways we can heal and more.

To the backslidden and sliding we can push and pull them to their feet. True story, a mountain guide lined up his charges in a row and then told them to bend over and place their hand on the person's butt in front of them. With much embarrassed laughter they all eventually complied. He said to them, "You are wondering why I am doing this, well when we are going up the mountain one behind another and someone starts to slide I don't want you to be embarrassed and hesitate to do what is necessary to catch them and help them survive."

In the church we need to do the same. Oh, not pat each other on the butt, but be ready to catch those who are falling and not be too embarrassed to extend a hand to help and heal.

Still don't think you are capable of this. Still think you are unworthy to Proclaim, Teach and Heal. Just consider who Jesus chose and said, "Come follow me."

Roll Video clip: "Disciple"

If God can use them why do you think God can't use you?

What is God saying, and what are you going to do?

In Jesus' name, amen.