

Calling

**And he said to them,
'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'**

Matthew 4:19, NRSV

What does it mean to be a follower or 'disciple' of Jesus?

Is it simply agreeing to a statement of beliefs? Or attending church on a Sunday?

For the first disciples, the call was something far more immediate, personal, and life-altering. As Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he interrupts the ordinary, sweat-filled workday of two sets of brothers. His call is not to a new hobby or a weekend activity, but to a radical reorientation of their entire existence. They are invited to leave their economic security and embark on a new mission. This week, we explore this compelling call and ask what it means for us to hear and respond to it today.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult"
2. "Take My Life, and Let It Be"
3. "Facing a Task Unfinished"

Closing Prayer

We thank you that you enter into our lives and call us by name. Forgive us for clinging so tightly to the nets we've made – our security, our plans, our priorities.

Give us the courage of the first disciples to respond to your voice.

We pray that you would fulfil your promise: to help us share the good news with love and grace. Show us this week how we can reflect your hope and joy where you've called us to be.

Equip us for your service, we pray. Amen.



Reflective

Let's read our passage: Matthew 4:18-22.

Picture the scene: the Sea of Galilee. The sun is glinting on the water. Simon (who Jesus will call Peter) and his brother Andrew are at work, casting their nets into the lake. It's a physically demanding and repetitive task. It is their livelihood, their family trade. This is their life.

Then Jesus arrives. He doesn't ask about their qualifications or their religious background. He simply issues a call: "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people." He invites them to join him, to learn from him, and to be repurposed by him. Their core skill – fishing – will be transformed for a new and eternal purpose.

(Pause for a time of silence. When did you first feel that sense of calling to follow Jesus?)

Notice their response in verse 20: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." There is no hesitation, no 'let me think about it'. The call of Jesus is so compelling that they immediately lay down their tools and follow after him.

(Pause for another time of silence. What are the 'nets' in your own life? The things that define you, that you work hard at, that give you identity and security?)

Jesus walks on and sees another pair of brothers, James and John. They are in a boat with their father, Zebedee, preparing their nets. They are part of a family business. Jesus calls them, and their response is just as immediate. Verse 22 tells us, "immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." They don't just leave their equipment, but also their family and the family business, the structure of their society and security for the future. The call of Jesus is so enticing that it takes precedence over everything. Of course, we know that they continue to fish, but from now on it will have been reorientated around the call to live as a follower of Jesus.

This isn't just a story about fishermen. It's a story about the nature of discipleship. Following Jesus is not adding a new hobby to our list of interests; it's about defining life as one of knowing, loving and following him.

For quiet reflection

- Jesus says, "I will make you..." He doesn't say "You must make yourselves..." What does that say to you?
- What does it mean to "fish for people" today, in a way that is good news and not manipulative?
- The disciples left things behind. What might Jesus be asking you to 'leave behind' to follow him more closely? (This could be an attitude, a priority, a habit, or a fear).

Creative Prayer Response

Hold your hands out in front of you, palms up. Imagine placing your 'nets' – your job, your security, your plans, your relationships – into your hands. Offer them to Jesus. Ask him to show you how to use them for his purposes, to make you a 'fisher of people' right where you are.

Takeaway for this week

The disciples had to be prepared to lay down their nets to follow Jesus. Spend time this week considering whether there's anything in your life that you need to lay down to follow Jesus more faithfully, perhaps to then pick it up again, enriched by his calling. Each morning, consciously offer that 'net' to God in a short prayer, saying, "Lord, I choose to trust you. Help me follow you."

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

Discussion Starters:

1. In the first-century Jewish world disciples usually sought out and chose a rabbi to follow. Here, Jesus chooses his disciples. What is the significance of this reversal?
2. The response of both sets of brothers is "immediate". Why do you think Matthew emphasises this?
3. "I will send you out to fish for people." This is a powerful metaphor. What would it have meant to these fishermen?
4. What are the positive (and perhaps negative) connotations of this phrase today? How can we reclaim its original sense of an invitation to mission?
5. James and John leave not only their boat but also their father. In a patriarchal society, built on family honour and trade, how radical would this action have been?
6. Compare this account with the call of Elisha by Elijah in **1 Kings 19:19-21**. What are the similarities and differences? How does this Old Testament background help us understand Jesus as a fulfilment of the prophetic pattern?

Applying this to our lives

- Does following Jesus today require such a dramatic abandonment of career and family?
- If our call mirrors those early disciples, then what does that look like for an accountant, a student, a stay-at-home parent, a retiree - in other words, for any and each of us?
- The call was personal ("follow me") but resulted in a community. How important is the church in sustaining our walk with Jesus?

For next time

Our next session focuses on the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where the crowds are amazed that Jesus teaches "as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." To understand what made Jesus different, do a little research this week on the role of Scribes and Pharisees in first-century Judaism. Find out how they typically taught and what their source of authority was (hint: it usually involved citing others). This will make the unique, personal authority of Jesus's teaching next week stand out in sharp relief.

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FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 4:18-22. Jesus calls two lots of brothers to be his followers (Disciples) and we start to hear how God will use them to share his love and good news with people.

Helpful Resources (things to include for maximum fun)

- Some old rope or netting to cut up and pass out for feeling the texture
- Space to play a running around game
- Loose pieces of string or rope for tying a net
- A beach net and objects to 'fish'

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Pass around a few sweets and ask everyone to take one and look at it. Think about the last time you enjoyed a delicious sweet, do you remember how good they are? But now imagine a friend calls you to leave those sweets and do something else. What do you enjoy so much that you would leave those sweets behind and go?

Interactive Story

[BACKGROUND SOUND PLAYING OF WATER - CAN YOU GET HOLD OF SOME NETTING OR OLD ROPE, THE MORE USED AND FRAYED THE BETTER, AND HAND OUT SMALL PIECES TO START BY HOLDING AND FEELING THE TEXTURE]

One day, Jesus was walking along a big lake called the Sea of Galilee. The sun was shining, and the water was calm. He saw two brothers, named Simon Peter and Andrew, who were fishermen. They were in a boat, working hard, throwing their big, heavy nets into the water to catch fish. It was their job, and they did it every single day. **[MIME THROWING OUT THE NETS]**

Jesus walked right up to them and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people!"

Now, that was a very strange thing to say! What did He mean by "fishers of people"? **[CAN YOU PULL A CONFUSED FACE?]**

But Simon Peter and Andrew didn't even ask a question. They knew in their hearts that they should listen to Jesus. So, they dropped their nets right away—splash! **[SEE IF YOU CAN FIND A WAY TO MAKE A SPLASH SOUND]**—and followed Him.

As they walked a little further along the shore, Jesus saw two more brothers. Their names were James and John. They were in a boat with their dad, Zebedee, and they were fixing their nets to get ready to fish. It was hard work, but it was what they always did.

Jesus called out to them as well. "Come and follow me!" He said.

And just like Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John didn't wait. They left their boat, and their job with their dad, to follow Jesus. **[YOU COULD PLAY A VERSION OF 'DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE' BUT CHANGE THE WORDS TO 'FISH, FISH, FOLLOW' - TO CONVEY THE SENSE OF IMMEDIATELY GETTING UP TO GO]**

They were all so excited to go with Jesus and learn what it meant to be "fishers of people". Instead of catching fish from the water, they would go and tell people about God's love. They would help bring people to Jesus so they could be part of His special family. And they couldn't wait to get started! **[NOW WE NEED SOME EXCITED FACES]**

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- Have loose pieces of string and learn to tie them into a simple net. Perhaps you could think of someone to pray for with each piece that's added.
- Use a beach net and some objects to practice 'fishing' for a selection of objects, you could set up a small paddling pool and fish them out of there.

TALKING POINTS

- It would be good to include a safety discussion about not following strangers who ask you to come with them. But then lead into the difference with Jesus being known as a 'Rabbi', which is a special kind of teacher, who called grown ups to become 'disciples' by following them as they taught people.
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, 'come and fish for people'?
- How can we show people what God's love looks like?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer