

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (NIV 84)

Theme: For the sake of the gospel...

1. Be willing to give up your livelihood.
2. Be willing to give up your family.
3. Support those that do it for you.

I'll admit, I'm not a big fisherman. In fact, I can't really call myself a fisherman at all! It's been about five years or so since I've wet a line. I'm not like some people I know who go fishing several times a week—and during good weeks, seven times. You have recreational fishermen and then those who do it for a living—commercial fishermen.

The method for commercial fishing is essentially the same as it was 2000 years ago. You throw out a net and drag it in the water for a while, hoping to catch some fish. Whether it's in the warm waters off of Florida, the North Atlantic, or the Bering Sea—commercial fishing is hard and treacherous work. They live on boats for days or weeks at a time.

Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee. And he saw some commercial fishermen casting their net into the sea—their names you know, Peter and Andrew. Jesus said to them, **Come, follow me; and I will make you fishers of men.** It was an invitation to stop fishing and to become his disciples. He would teach them God's Word, show them the true gospel, and would train them on sharing his Word to others. The Holy Spirit would then work through this gospel and

would bring many people to faith. So by their spreading of the gospel they would “catch men” for the Lord—he would make them his children.

I should mention that this wasn't the first time Jesus met these disciples. It seems that they had followed Jesus before. John mentions in his gospel—part of which we read last week, that John the Baptist led Andrew to Jesus; and Andrew in turn told Peter. The next day Jesus met Philip who told Nathanael. It was soon after this that Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine. The point is, this wasn't the first time that Andrew and Peter met Jesus; They had spent some time with him before this.

Nevertheless what did they do? **At once they left their nets and followed him.** There was no hesitation. They didn't second guess themselves. Right away they got out of their boat and followed Jesus. They didn't bother cleaning up all of their equipment. They didn't try to sell everything they had. They just left it behind to follow Christ. Think about that for a second. They were fishermen. It was probably all they knew. They weren't educated. It's not as if they could have found good paying jobs whenever they wanted. They left their lives and their livelihoods behind. How would they earn a living? How would they support themselves or their families? They didn't know and frankly they didn't care. They were only concerned about following the Lord.

Are you willing to follow their example? Although he doesn't demand it of us, are you willing to give up your livelihood for the sake of following Christ? Sadly, we are only willing to give up a little—but not too much. You may willingly and cheerfully put an envelope in the plate each week, but would you give up your overtime pay? Or what about some of your possessions—your house, your car, or your clothes? Would you give your job, your livelihood for the Lord?

After calling Andrew and Peter Jesus move on to James and John. They too were fishermen. They were with their Father, Zebedee and some hired men. Jesus said the same thing to them. He called them to follow him.

And what did they do? The same thing as Andrew and Peter. They got up and left their boat and followed Jesus. Once again, no hesitation, no second guessing; they simply got up and left. And they

didn't just leave behind their livelihoods. They left behind their Father. He remained on the boat with the hired men, while his sons and heirs left and followed a carpenter from Nazareth. We don't know exactly how old James and John were. But we do know that John was the last disciple to die. We also know that he died 70 years or so after this event took place. It is safe to say, then, that John was quite young when the Lord called him. He could have been a teenager at this time. A young boy leaving behind his Father, possibly his mother. Leaving his home and the only thing he really knew how to do.

Again, are we willing to do the same thing? It's one thing to give up some of the money the Lord has blessed you with, or some of the things that money can buy. But it's completely a different leave behind your family. To choose God over those you love. And often times we won't. We may choose to spend time with our families instead of worshiping the Lord or studying his Word. Or, even if we know what they are doing is a sin, we may still defend them even against God's Word.

And you know what the Lord says about doing so. **Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** Anyone who chooses their family over the Lord is not worthy of the Lord. Whoever does so ought to suffer forever.

There is a group of people who each year decide to follow in the disciples' example. They are found in our synod as well as in other places. They are the young men and women who choose to enter the public ministry. Those who choose to become pastors and teachers to serve the Lord in his kingdom.

They leave behind their homes—they could go anywhere in the country. Some are even sent to be missionaries in foreign lands, who risk their very lives for the Lord. They leave behind their friends and family. These men and women for the most part are smart and well-educated. They would have no problem finding well-paying jobs elsewhere. So they didn't choose to enter the public ministry because the pay is so great. They don't do it to be close to their families. So, then, why do they do it? For the love of the Lord. Not only do they get to serve the Lord, but they also get to do what he did. He went around Galilee preaching a simple message, **Repent and believe**

the Good News! He preached the law and the gospel. He convicted sinners of their sin so that he could share with them the sweet message of the forgiveness of sins—a message every Christian gets to share! It is the message of Jesus Christ. The world's one and only Savior. By his perfect life, his innocent suffering and death, and by his resurrection our sins have been paid for and removed. A perfect life is credited to us, and eternal life in heaven has already been won. It is Christ who makes us pure and innocent in the eyes of the Lord and it is Christ who will take us to heaven to live with him forever. This is given to us by God's grace alone, apart from anything we have ever done or can ever do.

It may seem like a simple message to us—one we hear all the time. But it is the gospel of our salvation. Through this gospel the Holy Spirit works. Through this gospel the Holy Spirit brings to faith and strengthens faith. Through the faith worked by the gospel we receive the blessings won for us by Christ. And faith cannot be present except by hearing this message. As Paul says in Romans 10, **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?** That is why men and women choose each year to leave behind their lives and choose God over the things of this world to spread the gospel—so that others may believe and join them in heaven. And so in this way they would be fishers of men. While the Lord does command us to put him first in our lives—before family, money, or the things of this world. And his will is that we all share our the gospel with those who do not yet know him. But doing so on a full-time basis is not for everyone. God gives all of us certain gifts which we are to use in appropriation with our faith. And he chooses some to serve him full time; and others he chooses to share the gospel as they interact with people in their day-to-day lives. You may not be public ministers of the gospel. You may not have specifically left behind your family to spread the good news. But there are those who do it for you. Sure, I do so on your behalf here on a local level. But there is much more, even in our own little synod. There are men and women who spend tens of thousands of dollars of their own money to study and train to be pastors and teachers. There are those who are sent throughout our own country and to the corners of the entire world with nothing but the gospel message. They go

throughout the world, leaving everything they know and love behind in order to tell others about their one and only Savior.

They serve the Lord on your behalf—because you can't be everywhere at once, they collectively do it for you. So support them in whatever way you can. Through your offerings, which go to help pay for their tuition, to start new congregations here in the U.S., and to send missionaries overseas. You support them through words of encouragement, and of course through your prayers. Right now, in the WELS there are over 70 pastoral vacancies—over 60 congregations without a pastor. In a few years that number might reach 100. The work of the gospel is always present. So as Jesus told the disciples, **The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**

There are those who fish for recreation, and then there are those who fish for their livelihoods. All of us are fishers for men as we share the gospel with those around us. For the sake of the gospel, let us be willing to give up anything and everything for the gospel. And there are those whose lives are dedicated to spreading the sweet message of forgiveness through Christ alone. Therefore, let us support those who spread the gospel for us throughout the world and catch men. For through the gospel taught and shared by them, we'll join more in heaven. Amen.