

MATTHEW 4:18–22. (EHV)

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen. He said to them, **“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** They immediately left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Perhaps you’ve heard the saying: If you want a job done right, do it yourself.

The idea behind the quote is that if you’re really concerned about a project’s success, if you’re picky, and if you have a clear idea of how you want the project to be completed, then you’re liable only to be disappointed with the results if you delegate the task to someone else. You’ll only be pleased with the results if you undertake the project yourself and obtain the results the way you visualized them being obtained.

In the season of Epiphany, we focus on how Jesus revealed and manifested himself. The first way Matthew records Jesus manifesting himself after his baptism is by preaching. But right after Jesus began preaching, he called four men to learn from him so that they could assist him in preaching the gospel.

Is this a good idea? Who is pickier than Jesus? Who has higher standards? Who has a clearer vision of what he wants accomplished than Jesus does? And he’s going to call fishermen to share in his important work? To be responsible for the spread of the gospel?

That in itself tells us something about Jesus. Jesus manifests himself in calling disciples.

1. He calls sinners

Before we take note of Jesus’s calling of these first four disciples, we should note what these disciples are, and what they aren’t. Matthew doesn’t actually use the word *disciple* here, but he uses it soon afterward. *Disciple* means a learner, student, or pupil, or even an apprentice. Even though *disciple* was later used as a synonym for *believer*, because believers are all students of Jesus, that isn’t the way the Gospels use the word *disciple*. A disciple usually was a believer, but there were believers who were not disciples of Jesus. A disciple was a full-time student of Jesus, someone who followed him around, listened to him teach, and worked under his direction and guidance. In the case of these first disciples, whom Jesus called to follow him and told that he would also make them preachers and fishers of men, we might call them seminarians today.

So even though we can certainly look at the way Jesus called these first disciples and draw comparisons to the way he has called all of us to be his followers, realize that we aren’t quite comparing apples to apples. Jesus has called all of you to follow him, learn from him, and share his word. But he has not called of you to study under him full time, and then to be sent into the public ministry.

With this in mind, let’s look at Jesus’s calling of his first four disciples. The first thing we can’t help but note as people who know the Gospels is that Jesus calls sinners to be his disciples. The first disciple mentioned is Peter. Yeah, that Peter. Peter who did have some shining moments, but they are overshadowed by his other moments—the moment when Jesus had to call him Satan, the moment when he took his eyes off Jesus and began to drown and had to ask Jesus

to save him, the three moments he fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus wanted him to keep watch and pray, the moment he cut off someone's ear and Jesus had to tell him to put his sword away, the three moments he denied his Lord after having given him his word that he would sooner die than disown him. This is who Jesus wants?

Andrew, Peter's brother, is probably the least objectionable of these first four disciples, but he's still just a fisherman like his brother. And he is the one who would ask Jesus, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far can they go among so many people?", even after he had seen Jesus perform many miracles.

James and John are the ones who would ask Jesus if they could call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that did not welcome Jesus, and would arrogantly ask Jesus if one of them could sit on his right and the other on his left in his kingdom.

All of them would flee and desert Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, in his moment of greatest need. This is who Jesus wants?

Yes, this is who Jesus wants. He wants sinners to follow him and be his disciples. He is manifesting his grace. He did not come for the healthy, but for the sick. Thank God, right? For if we were to rewind all of our lives, or if we could fast forward them, and find all of the reasons that Jesus should not have wanted us for his disciples—you in the broad sense, me also in the narrow sense as a public minister—we would find plenty, wouldn't we? Moments of doubt, denial, cruelty, obscenity, perversity, and worse. Thank God Jesus calls sinners to be his disciples, otherwise he would not have any.

2. He calls brothers

Here is another curious detail: For his first four disciples, he calls two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John. If we carefully compare a number of passages, we can even deduce that James and John were Jesus's first cousins on his mother's side. What is Jesus showing us about himself here?

Contrary to the impression we might get when he calls James and John away from their father, Jesus loves family and he loves families. He loves it when father, mother, sister, and brother are not just united with each other by blood, but also in faith in him. When people are related to each other, they know each other, and if they are united in faith, they can use that knowledge in a godly way to keep each other in check, keep each other humble, encourage each other, and support each other in need.

Jesus is also showing that his disciples need other disciples. He calls two pairs of brothers to stress that they can't and shouldn't be disciple islands. He wants his disciples to be each other's brothers and sisters even if they're not related to each other by blood.

3. He calls learners

We should also note that, even though these four men are going to be four of the apostles, he doesn't immediately call them to be apostles. He will designate and send them out as apostles, as we'll talk about in a bit, but for now he is just calling them to follow him, to be his disciple, to learn from him. We must listen and learn in order to do and before we can do. We cannot think ourselves model believers if we do not regularly take time to listen to Jesus and learn from him.

Since these four men would be full-time public ministers of the gospel, they had to leave their former livelihoods behind even when learning from Jesus. Jesus doesn't call all of us to be

public ministers, and so he doesn't call all of us to leave our normal lives and livelihoods behind, but he does want all of us to regularly listen and learn from him, which does require putting aside our work and leaving behind our livelihoods for a bit.

4. He calls fishermen

The first four disciples Jesus called were also fishermen. What does that tell us about Jesus? It tells us how he views the work of his kingdom. He views it like fishing. And if you stop to think about it, the analogy fits pretty well. In this analogy, people are fish. What does a fish do? It swims around here, then it swims over there, then it hovers in the water here, then it eats, then it hovers in the water there, then it swims over to those weeds, then it hides or swims away from this bigger fish, then it swims over there... It's not much of a life, is it? There's not much purpose to it, is there? This probably wouldn't be too popular a view to express publicly today, but really, if you think about it, a fish's life with its aimless movements only acquires a purpose when it gets caught.

So it is with us. What are we humans in this life apart from the gospel of Jesus? We move here and there, do this and that, eat a meal now and then, and for what? Our movements and activities are aimless and pointless unless and until we get caught by Jesus in the gospel's net.

5. He calls with a promise

And note the promise that Jesus gives his disciples: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." On the one hand, Jesus is telling them that their job is only to fish. They will listen to Jesus and thereby they will acquire bait that they can use to fish for people. But fishermen aren't always catcher-men. Even if they've built an addition onto their house to hold all their fishing equipment, they still get skunked. Jesus calls his disciples to fish. Their job is going to be simply to throw the bait, to share the gospel as God gives them the opportunity.

On the other hand, you can't truly call yourself a fisherman if you don't catch fish at all, if you don't catch fish somewhat regularly. And in fact, Luke tells us that Jesus not only told his disciples they would be *fishers* of people, but also that they would *catch* people. Jesus doesn't promise us a life of easy success with the gospel, but he does promise that the gospel will catch some. We will not return home with empty nets every time. The preaching of Jesus has power, so much power that it catches people even when it comes from the mouths of sinners and those who are less educated.

6. He calls with effect

Finally, Jesus manifests himself in calling disciples, in the fact that he succeeds in calling them. Neither Peter nor Andrew nor James nor John say, "No, thank you," when Jesus calls them. Peter and Andrew "immediately left their nets and followed him." James and John "immediately...left the boat and their father and followed him." Now this wasn't their first encounter with Jesus. John tells us about Peter and Andrew's and his own first encounter with Jesus. They had been listening to John the Baptist preach, and John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So they followed Jesus and spent a whole day with him. Their hearts were touched and affected by his word.

So now, when he calls them to follow him full time and prepare to preach his message full time, they do not hesitate. Jesus calls them with effect, just as he called you to follow him

with effect in your baptism, just as he calls some to serve him with the gospel full time with effect still today, so that they are willing to travel far away from their families, sometimes overseas, in order to follow Jesus's call.

As we think about the current shortage of pastors in our synod, instead of just shaking our heads and wringing our hands, we ought to connect this shortage with the One who calls people into the public ministry with effect. Pray to him and ask him to send workers into his harvest field. And encourage gifted young people to consider studying for the preaching or teaching ministry. If you are a young person whom a pastor, other church leader, or any fellow Christian has encouraged to think about studying for the public ministry, don't just ignore it. It's not a sin for you to decide not to enter the public ministry, but you should also give that encouragement your serious consideration, because that is how Jesus calls people into the public ministry with effect today.

What a beautiful manifestation of Jesus! He calls sinners, which manifests his grace. He calls brothers, which manifests his desire that all his followers be brothers and sisters to each other. He calls learners, which manifests his desire to teach us. He calls fishermen, which manifests how he views the work of his kingdom and how he desires to give our lives eternal purpose. He calls with a promise, which manifests the power of his kingdom and of his word. And he calls with effect, which manifests the joy and privilege it is to serve in the public ministry of the gospel.

May Jesus continue to manifest his grace and power in calling us to follow him, and in calling others to follow him through us and through his believers around the world. Amen.