

***Basic Training: The Few, The Proud...***  
***By Jason Huff***  
***January 24, 2015***  
***Ezekiel 11:17-20; Romans 15:5-6; Matthew 4:18-22***

Friends, our final Scripture reading tonight comes from Matthew 4:18-22. I invite you to turn there in your Bibles and to pull out your bulletin worksheet to follow along. Let's listen to the Word of God. "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."

When I say "the few, the proud..." what do you say response? (The Marines!) I grew up with ads telling us that the Marines look were an elite fighting force that only the most talented could join. I'd like to think that the country's finest are protecting us. There are other jobs that I'd like to think qualify as the elite – my doctor, my airline pilot, my lawyer. We don't always get the best and brightest, but we'd love it if we did.

In the church over the centuries, we've thought our leaders were the elites too. Clergy were special. Priests wore unique clothing; in some traditions, they still do. The clergy supposedly knew the Bible well and could explain it all; they were trained to speak God's Word and to care for God's people with energy and enthusiasm while maintaining a lively prayer life. They were in a class all by themselves, and the rest of us would just pray that God might shine His grace on us too. Sometimes we look at Paul in the Bible, who was an elite Pharisee before He wrote a good chunk of the New Testament, and we think, I couldn't ever be that guy.

But what if Paul is the exception to the rule? What if Jesus had different plans in mind for the vast majority of leaders in His church? What if Jesus laid the groundwork with the original apostles and still follows the same patterns today? In Matthew's account of the calling of the first disciples, Jesus doesn't call the elite, just the willing.

Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida, not far from His new home base of Capernaum. He approaches two sets of brothers – Simon Peter and Andrew, then James and John. While fishermen were considered lower-class, they made a good living. It was backbreaking and sometimes dangerous work, but it paid well. Both families appear to own their own fishing businesses; they have their own boats and nets. The Zebedee brothers are working with their dad, probably part of the family business. Jesus said to them all, "Follow me."

From the other gospels, we know this isn't the first time these four have met Jesus. He isn't coming to them out of the blue. They've known Him, been taken with Him, challenged and changed by Him, if only by their brief encounters. They are surprisingly quick to respond. They immediately left their boats and nets and came with Jesus. There was no debate, no second-guessing; they just followed. They walked away from one life and into a new one.

It's a weird story for reasons we might not recognize. For one, rabbis didn't go around recruiting. Rabbis sometimes traveled around teaching, but students went to them, asking if they could come under their tutelage. Jesus turns that around. He's doing the asking. These aren't normal students, either. The best and brightest found rabbis in Jerusalem. Others in the second tier might start off learning from the local rabbi at their synagogue. These guys weren't students at all. They weren't looking to be. Later in Acts, everyone is astonished at how much these guys know because they were "unschooled" and "ordinary." Fishermen didn't have a reputation for being scholars. They were really dense. But God works with them in spite of all that.

It also shows how great a teacher Jesus is when He gives them a simple word to motivate them to come. "Follow me," He says, "and I will make you fishers of men." In the recent mini-series **The Bible**, when Peter asks Jesus what they are going to do, Jesus says, "Change the world." Jesus ever actually said that. He appealed to them in language they could understand. They would fish for souls. They would go from netting a few fish to fill a few bellies to netting souls that would spend eternity in God's Kingdom! Jesus created a beautiful metaphor we'll explore in a few moments. Not only are we followers of Jesus, we are fishermen for God.

CrossWay is on the cusp of moving forward big time. We are working with the church that purchased the old Church of the Covenant building to possible use their old equipment and rental space. With God's blessings, we'll start moving in that direction or something similar within a few months. We'll be back on Sunday mornings in a space we can call our own. But we're going to have a lot of work ahead of us.

We are a mission church, a church tasked with bringing new people into the Kingdom of God. That's a big task, but it's one God has given us. Everything that happened in the last year wasn't by accident but by God's design to reach more of Macomb for Himself. But how do we respond? How do we accomplish what God desires? This passage answers a lot of those questions for us and gives us confidence that with God's help, we are up to the task ahead.

First, *God gives those He calls to follow Him the tools they need to get the job done.* These guys had little going for them in the religious world. In another gospel, Peter begs Jesus to leave him because, in his own words, he is "a sinful man." These guys know their boats and their waters, not deep theological truths and ancient prophecies. But Jesus promises it will be OK. "I will make you fishers of men." It's not that Peter and Andrew and the rest will make themselves fishers of men; Jesus will transform them. Their job is to follow Him.

And Jesus did what He promised. It was a hard road; the disciples made tons of mistakes; they doubted all along the way; it wasn't until they received the Holy Spirit that they fully got it. But Jesus did it. He gave them the tools, the training, and the Spirit they needed to serve Him. The apostles laid the foundation of the church that still stands today.

One reason I love the Presbyterian church is because we believe that Jesus still does exactly this in our modern churches. We don't have bishops making decisions. I don't have the power to make major decisions about the church alone. It's done by elders elected from within the congregation, people the congregation senses have been called to the task by God. In the very best situation, ordinary people lead Christ's church just as the apostles did.

As CrossWay moves forward, it could be easy to shrink back from our responsibilities. Almost all of us were a part of Church of the Covenant, mostly simple churchgoers. We weren't looking to change the world or bring tons of people to Christ. We wanted to worship, pray, and be encouraged to keep the faith and live a life pleasing to God. I never thought I would plant a church. I'm a preacher and teacher, not an evangelist. I am not an extrovert; I'm not the first one to race in and meet new people. It would be easy for all of us to say, "Who am I to invite people to church? I don't know enough. I'm not smart enough. I'm not extroverted enough. I'm certainly not holy enough. Why would God choose me?"

The answer is in the calling of the fishermen. Jesus didn't call them because they were special. He called them because the Father chose them for Him to use. He molded and shaped and formed them into powerful witnesses for Himself. When God put it on the hearts of our elders to start CrossWay, He didn't do it because we are awesome but because He knows CrossWay can be used for His glory.

Are we scared about moving forward? Sure. Will we have enough growth, enough people, enough money? All good questions. But God has that in *His* hands. He will take care of it. Our chief aim is not to figure all that out on our own. If we could, would we even need Him? Instead, God makes those question marks large in our hearts so we will rely on Him all the more.

Remember that metaphor we heard a moment ago? "I will make you fishers of men"? It explains our role as Christians beautifully. When my friend Curt goes out ice fishing, he has all his gear with him. He uses his auger to make a hole in the ice; he uses all the tools in his bag of tricks. On a good day, he catches a lot of fish. But Curt doesn't choose what fish he catches. He doesn't look under the ice and say, "That one's mine." He puts down his line and lure and he catches whatever happens to be biting.

As fishers of men, we aren't called to save everyone. Our job is to put out the nets. Through living a life pleasing to God and living out the fruit of the Spirit --- kindness, compassion, charity, longsuffering, patience, goodness – we begin to put out the spiritual nets God has given us. When we talk about Christ to others and invite them to worship and to fellowship, we start reeling people in.

But it's not up to us to decide who comes and who stays away, who swims in the net and who swims out. We can't force a single person to believe in Jesus for salvation. But we can introduce them to Jesus, and through our nets, God will bring the ones He has chosen into His catch. Those that do swim in will find themselves redeemed and whole and washed by the blood of the Son of God. God sends them into our nets, and once they're caught, He cleans them and prepares them. We've just got to get out in the boat and throw out the nets.

That leads us to a challenge in the passage: *God leads the faithful to follow right now.* These guys drop everything to follow Jesus. Right in the middle of their work, they just leave it all behind. They don't know everything they are getting themselves into, but they know they have to follow. This man who is more than a man holds the key to life. They know it. The only thing that makes sense is to drop what they're doing and get in line behind Him.

And really, who wants to be waiting around for somebody to make up their mind? There's a time to do your homework, there's a time to find out your options, and then there's the time to act. When the time is right, you do it. You find the used car you've been looking for on sale lower than you've ever seen it before, you buy it. If you wait around, it might be gone. You make a decision to stop smoking, to get healthy, to lose ten pounds, to help a charity, to reach out to someone in need, you gotta pull the trigger and do it. We're fickle. Tomorrow, we may change our minds. Choosing not to decide is still a choice. There are plenty of people who wish they bought Apple at \$10 a share.

God is calling us to move with Him now. You might get on board with His plan in a year or two or three. It'll be great when you step out in faithfulness. But if we all wait a year or two or three, it will be too late for CrossWay. God is giving us an opportunity here and now. He's given us a solid core of people who care about each other. He's given us a new denomination that is faithful to His Word and wants to help us. We have the ability to make the most of it, to commit to being engaged. We've been praying and seeking out how best to move forward, and it looks like we have some answers. Within three months, if God shows us this is His will, we will be moving forward on those plans. Will we all be on board when it's time?

There is a place for you at CrossWay. God has given everyone distinct abilities and gifts to help. We need more folks to count the money; it takes ten minutes after each service. We need folks who will commit to handling coffee hour. We need a couple folks to be willing to move chairs around. We need help in the childrens' ministry and the praise team. The things that we can do as a congregation are limited only by our willingness and God's gifts to us. We won't even always do it very well at first; the disciples certainly didn't! But we'll learn! We'll grow! God will provide! We must simply determine, when I get the call to serve, to share, to go, to grow, I will be like Peter and Andrew and James and John and go to it!

Here's the tough part: *following when Jesus calls usually means a sacrifice of some sort.* These four left good jobs behind. The Zebedee brothers left family behind. They left behind valuable equipment and they didn't take the time to sell everything off to their competitors. As Peter tells Jesus later on, "We have left everything to follow you!" Not everyone's sacrifice will be the same, but there will be sacrifice.

You already know that. You're here on a Saturday night when there are a lot of other things you could be doing. You've made the sacrifice of time, many of you faithfully, to show up Saturday after Saturday. You've stuck with it. I am very proud of you.

There will be other sacrifices as we move forward. We'll get to worship on Sundays, but we'll sacrifice in other ways. We will have to be consistent in our giving and our outreach. We may have to do some things that wouldn't be our first choice to do to make it work. Our new worship space will be smaller than what we're used to. It'll be homey, which is great, but you're going to have to be early to sit in the back row and not the front! As we reach more people, we will have to give more of our time, whether we're fixing computers or tutoring students or leading weight-loss classes or having a youth hangout or doing whatever it is God leads us to do to reach the community. It will mean more time together in prayer, because we cannot expect God to bless what we do if we are not deliberate in prayer.

We live with sacrifices every day. We work a job that isn't our favorite so we can take care of our family. We skip a promotion because we need to take care of an elderly parent. Everybody's got one, but sacrifice is not new to us. If God made this universe for us and created us for His glory, and if His Son Jesus gave His life to save us from the consequences of our sin, we should expect to make sacrifices for Him as we say thank you.

But there is also great news hidden in this passage: *we get to share in the rewards of the catch*. Professional fishermen don't fish for the fun of it. It's great if they love to do it, but the pros are there to earn a living. Peter and Andrew and James and John made their livelihood fishing. When Jesus told them He would make them into fishers of men, it wasn't with no thought of reward.

Peter later confronts Jesus about all that they have given up. Jesus replies that those who have given up things in this life for Him will gain even more and, in the end, gain eternal life. Jesus promises eternal life for those of us who follow Him. Should we follow Jesus because it's the right thing to do? Of course. But that doesn't mean there is no reward in it. We follow Him to be a part of His world, to be co-inheritors of the Kingdom.

And Jesus promises His joy for us right now as we obey. We know that's true. It's incredible when we get 60, 70, 80 people here on a Meal and Movie Night. It feels amazing to help a bunch of people and invite them into our fellowship. Baptizing Daryl and Darnell and Cameron a few months back was awesome!

When we reach out, when we cast out those nets, not only do people come into the Kingdom and slowly grow into the church, we get to enjoy it! We get blessed. We see that all the efforts are not in vain. Know this – Jesus taught that a simple cup of cold water given in His name would not be forgotten. Every action you do with the intent of furthering God's Kingdom will not go unnoticed by God. It may not have an immediate impact. It may not have the result we expect. But God knows. God sees.

God is not concerned about us being successful. He is concerned with our being faithful. If we are faithful, whether we see success or failure in the eyes of the world, if CrossWay lasts nine months or nine years or ninety years, if we are faithful to share His love and cast the nets and fish for the souls of those around us for Christ, we will have fulfilled our calling as the servants and friends of our incredible God.

Faithful followers of Jesus are indeed the few and the proud, but God intends to bring more of us into the Kingdom. We can join the ranks of those who drop our worldly desires to fulfill His calling and reap the blessings of it for all time. We can be proud to serve the God who has never failed His people, who saved Israel throughout its history, who saves us through His very own Son, who even now shows the world what true love really is. We've been called to follow Him – have you packed your fishing poles yet?