

# “Three Short Years – Calling the Disciples”

*Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51*

## *The true story*

After being plunged in the Jordan River by John, after proclaiming that “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Good News” (Mark 1:15), after being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus begins his public ministry in earnest. He goes to the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls his first disciples to their new life with him, and they will never be the same.



We are one church and we are part of one body, Christ’s body. We are one fellowship formed and sustained by the Holy Spirit. God calls us to the relational life; a life lived with others in love and grace. That is who we are and who we are called to be. From the very first days of Jesus’ public ministry, we see him and his first followers reaching out to others, telling them what God was doing in and through Jesus and inviting them to join in changing their hearts and lives. They would walk a new path . . . together.

## *The Lamb of God*

It was about 27AD, and a man named John had gone out to the Jordan River preaching the coming of God’s kingdom and urging his fellow Jews to come out to the river to be washed in the river’s water, symbolizing their repentance of sin and their cleansing of its stain. Since the time of Joshua, more than a millennium before, the Jordan River had been a potent symbol of Israel’s freedom and the people’s allegiance to the LORD God.

Not surprisingly, John attracted a lot of attention. So much so that the High Priest sent some representatives out to see him. John willingly told them that he was neither the Messiah nor Elijah. Rather, he was the one spoken of in the scroll of Isaiah, the one who would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (see Isaiah 40:1-11). John told his questioners that he was not even worthy to tie the sandals of the one who was coming. The next day, John saw Jesus of Nazareth coming to him. John stopped what he was doing, pointed directly at Jesus and said for all to hear:

“Behold. The Lamb of God,<sup>1</sup> who takes away the sin<sup>2</sup> of the world.”

How did John know that Jesus, a relative of John’s, was the “Lamb of God”? John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River some time earlier. So, John told the crowd what he had seen when he baptized Jesus. John told them that this man, Jesus, was the reason John had called people out to the river. John had seen the Spirit descend on Jesus in the Jordan River and remain on him. Further, God had revealed to John that Jesus was “God’s Chosen One.”

## *Jesus calls his first disciples*

To this point in John’s gospel, we’ve heard the testimony of John--the gospel writer, not the Baptizer—that Jesus is the Word-in-the-flesh, the creator and source of life. We’ve also heard John the Baptizer proclaim Jesus to be the Lamb of God. We’ve even met a few of the Jewish authorities who were sent to check out the work of the wild John. But now, we begin to meet some people with whom we can really identify. Ordinary people, like you and me.

Right there at the Jordan River, Jesus is beginning to meet people. “Come and see” he says. Andrew and the other man (probably John the gospel writer) may think they are looking for Jesus, but, in truth, it is Jesus who finds them. At this point the pair know only what they have learned from John the Baptizer. But they are drawn to this man from Galilee and they go to spend the rest of the day with him.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, “Lamb of God” is found only twice in the Bible, here and in 1:36. John probably intends it to refer to both the sacrificial lamb and the triumphant lamb depicted in Revelation 5.

<sup>2</sup> Notice that “sin” here is singular not plural. “Sin” here is not just the individual transgressions nor even their sum, but the dark beast that imprisons us, holding us in bondage.

What's the first thing Andrew does after meeting Jesus? He runs to get his brother, Simon, excitedly telling him that they have found the Messiah. It is "go and get" so Simon can "come and see" for himself. Imagine if all of us were as excited about sharing the Good News as Andrew was.

The next day, Jesus heads for Galilee, presumably with Andrew, Simon Peter, and the other friend alongside him. Jesus finds a man named Philip and tells him too, "Follow me." Philip's hometown was that of Andrew and Peter, Bethsaida, though Peter was living in Capernaum at the time of Jesus' public ministry. Philip then approaches a friend, Nathanael, telling him that he's found the one long promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. Of course, when Philip says that "the one" is from Nazareth, Nathanael scoffs. How could the great Messiah come from a dump like Nazareth?! But Andrew persists, telling Nathanael to just "come and see." And when Nathanael meets Jesus, he proclaims Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, though he doesn't grasp Jesus' full identity. Still, Nathanael enthusiastically responds to the invitation.

### ***The calling of Simon Peter***

Nearly all Christians have heard Jesus' statement to Peter, "from now on you will fish for people." The metaphor is clear enough to us – Peter had caught an abundance of fish and now he would catch people. But most of us don't know that the metaphor is not original to Jesus. Centuries before God had spoken through Jeremiah of sending out "hordes of fishermen" to catch his people and bring them in, i.e., back together after the various dispersions and scatterings at the hands of invaders from the time of the Assyrians forward. Why? So that they could be judged as the gathered people of God.

But now Jesus has taken the metaphor and reshaped it. Peter and the rest would fish for people as instruments of God's salvation. The time had come to proclaim the Good News and gather in all of humanity, not merely the Jews but the Gentiles as well. So Jesus is going to begin calling to his side some of those he had met earlier.

Peter and his partners are fisherman, just small businessmen making a living from the Sea of Galilee, But now they are being called into God's service. They will leave their present lives behind, follow Jesus, and become his disciples. They will have purpose. They will be on a mission. They will see Jesus turn the world upside, caring and healing the marginalized and the weak and the oppressed. They will hear him proclaim the arrival of God's kingdom and the sure promise that God's Day had arrived.

### ***Fishing for people . . . for the kingdom of God***

We are so used to hearing Jesus' Great Commission that we can be blinded to what is actually on the page. Jesus doesn't say, "Go and save souls," or "Go and make believers." Jesus knows that soul-saving and believer-making is God's work, not ours. But Jesus does tell his disciples to make more disciples, across the globe – catching ever more.

The word "disciple" has a specific meaning. It doesn't mean those who love Jesus. You can love Jesus and not be a disciple. Rather, a disciple of Jesus or anyone else is learning to be like the master. More so than "student" or "learner," the word "apprentice" gets us closest to the true meaning of "disciple." Apprentices, in any vocation, are those who are consciously striving, learning, and practicing to be like the master to whom they are apprenticed. This apprenticeship encompasses every part of the apprentice's being: our head, our heart, and our hands.

Discipleship is about doing; learning to do as our Master did. People are surprised when they find out that I recommend against using a red-letter Bible, in which Jesus' words, and nothing else, are in red. It's not that I'm against Jesus' teachings; the problem is that a redletter Bible makes it seem that what Jesus *did* was less important than what he *said*. Yet, we know from our own experiences that what we *do* often reveals more about who we are than what we *say*. Even our children know that the ole' "Do as I say, not as I do" doesn't really cut it! Jesus had the wisdom to both say it **and** do it.

And what did Jesus do? He traveled and he taught and he proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God and he invited and he welcomed . . . and he healed. All of this was focused on Jesus' astonishing claim that in him, the long-awaited dawning of God's kingdom had arrived. As Jesus puts it in the opening of Mark's gospel, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the good news" (1:15).

It is pretty easy for us to grasp that Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. Many of Jesus' parables begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of God<sup>3</sup> is like this . . ." The Sermon of the Mount is an extended teaching of what the kingdom of God is like. But what about Jesus' actions? His dining with tax collectors and prostitutes. His healing of the lame and the

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<sup>3</sup> Being sensitive to some Jews' refusal even to say the word "God," Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God," but they mean the same thing.

blind and the sick. Yes, these were acts of compassion, but they were far more: they were enactments of the kingdom of God. Not just mini-dramas to make a point, but the genuine bursting forth of God's kingdom which is meant for all people, for all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3).

***Inviting: Come and see***

Perhaps God's challenge to us to invite is as simple as Andrew's "come and see." Andrew doesn't pass out tracts or stand on street corners. He doesn't grab folks by the collar and drag them into some place they'd rather not be. Instead, he simply tells his friend what Jesus told him, "Come and see." Andrew is confident that Nathanael's encounter with Jesus will be as profound and life-changing as his own. Just a simple "come and see."

Of course, one might ask, what is it that people are invited to "come and see" now. It's not as if Jesus of Nazareth is standing in the Narthex waiting to greet visitors. But in a sense, he can be.

John the Baptizer testified to the light, that is, to Jesus, the "true light that enlightens the world" (John 1:7-8). When Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the light of the world," (Matthew 5:14) he means that the light of Christ is to shine through his disciples, through you and me. Those we invite to "come and see" are to see Jesus in each of us. So we invite and we welcome and we greet and we embrace, as we proclaim the Good News to all those who come to hear.