

Matthew 4:12-23

When is the last time you faced a **life-changing** choice? Maybe you've struggled with the decision of what **school** to attend for **college**, or what **job** to take to support yourself and your family. Many of us have faced the decision of whom we should **marry**. Pastors and teachers face life-changing decisions every time they receive a **call** to serve in a **different** congregation. In our reading for today, we find some men who were **also** challenged with a life-changing decision. The question was, would they **leave behind** what they were **currently** doing, and **follow Jesus**? As we look at their story this morning, we need to realize that each and every one of us faces a potentially life-changing decision **every day** when we wake up in the morning. We have to **choose** whether we are going to be **satisfied** with the status quo - with doing things the **same way** we've **been** doing them - or whether we're going to devote ourselves **more fully** to **following Jesus**. Putting ourselves into the events of our text for today, we ask ourselves the question, "Are we willing to **Leave The Boat Behind** and follow Jesus?"

The first verse of our text informs us, "*When Jesus heard that John was put in **prison**, he withdrew into **Galilee**. He left Nazareth, and went to live in **Capernaum**, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.*" The events which are mentioned here tell us that our reading took place about a **year** into the **public ministry** of Jesus. The **first** year of Jesus' ministry was spent primarily in **Judah** - in and around the city of **Jerusalem**. This was the **heartland** of the Jewish **people** and **faith**. It was also an area of intense **opposition** to **Jesus** from the **Pharisees** and **other** Jewish leaders. But, now it was time for Jesus to go and do His work in a region where He could move around a little more **freely** - the **northern** land of **Galilee**.

Matthew goes on to point out for us that this decision of Jesus to live and work in **Galilee** was actually the fulfillment of a **prophecy**. The Prophet **Isaiah** had written, "*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, **Galilee** of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great **light**, and on those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death a **light** has dawned.*" The region of Galilee included a great **diversity** of cultures. There were certainly many **Jews** living there, but there were also many **foreigners**. There were descendants of the **Canaanites** who had never been **expelled** from the region. And there were descendants of the **Assyrians** who had been shipped into the region back in the days when the Jews had been carried off into **captivity**. The **religious** beliefs of the people living there were a **melting pot** of these many different cultures. And because of that tremendous **diversity**, we would hardly

expect to find **any** worship of the **one true God** there. Galilee was truly a land **covered** in spiritual **darkness**. But into that **darkness** came the one true **Light** - **Jesus**. And He came with the same **message** which John the Baptist had brought, *“Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near.”* Many people took this message to **heart** and **followed** Jesus. **Sadly**, however, we know that **most** of them eventually **fell away**. In the not too distant future Jesus would say of these people, *“You, Capernaum, will you be **lifted up** to heaven? **No**, you will **go down** to hell. For if the **miracles** performed in you had been performed in **Sodom**, it would have **remained** until this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for the land of **Sodom** on the day of judgment than for you.”*

In many ways, we are living in a country which is **similar** to Galilee. There is certainly a great mixture of **cultures** and **ethnicities** to be found within the borders of the United States, although we don't really **notice** it that much right here in Osceola. This diversity is a **blessing**, but it can also be a **stumbling block**. The concept of **tolerance** is something which is deeply engrained in our American society, and that concept of **tolerance** has made its way into America's **religious beliefs** as well. You can believe whatever you **want** to believe, as long as you allow everyone else to believe whatever **they** want to believe - whether it's **true**, or **not**. In this way, the **ultimate** truth of the **Bible** is called into **question** and is **compromised**, as it's put on the **same level** as every other “holy book.” The result is that we don't just live in a land of spiritual **diversity** - we live in a land of spiritual **apathy**. There is truly a spiritual **darkness** which covers our land.

But, into this **darkness**, comes **Jesus**, bringing us the **light of life**, and His message to **us** is the same as it was to the people of **Galilee**, *“Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near.”* In other words, turn away from your **dark** ways, and turn to **Jesus** in faith. Thank God that we have heard the message of **salvation**, and that we **know** that the one **speaking** these words is our **Savior**. Jesus has brought **light** into our lives by making His Gospel **shine** on us. We know that we don't have to live with the shroud of **sin** and **death** covering us, because we have been set free by the power of Jesus' **death** and **resurrection**. Jesus has called us to **faith**, and we **thank God** for it.

In our reading today, we see Jesus give a **different** call to four men. It's **not** the call to **faith**, because faith was something which they already **possessed**. This was a call to **follow** Him - to **learn** from Him - and eventually, to be the ones who would **spread** His saving **message** throughout the world. Hear once again how that call came about for Peter and Andrew, *“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**.'*" These were men who **knew** about fishing - it was their life's **occupation**. But now Jesus called them to a **different** occupation - an even **greater** one. They were no longer to be fishers of **fish** - they were to be fishers of **men**. That meant **leaving** their **first** occupation, and **completely** devoting themselves to following **Jesus**. They needed to **observe** Him from day to day. They needed to **learn** from Him so that one day **they** would be able to win **others** for God's kingdom by preaching the **Gospel** - the **Good News** of the eternal **salvation** which was available through **Jesus**. If they said **yes** to this call, their lives would never be the **same**. And that is exactly what they **did**. We're told, "**Immediately they left their nets and followed him**."

Just a short time later, Jesus gave the same call to **James** and **John**. We're told, "*Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, **James** son of Zebedee and his brother **John**. They were in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. **Jesus called them**."* And what was their **response**? "*Immediately they **left the boat and their father and followed him***." Think about what a **life-changing** decision they had just made. They **left the boat**. That **boat** represented **life** as they knew it. That **boat** represented their means of **income** - their means of **survival**. That **boat** was what they were **used** to. They also left their **father**. Not only were they leaving behind their **occupation**, they were leaving behind their **family** as well. How would it be possible for them to **answer** that call? The answer is **simple**. They knew the one who was **sending** that call. Their decision wasn't made on a **whim**. They already **trusted** in Jesus as the Son of **God**, and the **Savior** of the world. So, when **He** called them to **follow**, they gladly and willingly **followed**.

The question is how does **their** story affect **our** story - right **here** and right **now**? Obviously, there are some **differences**. For **one**, we aren't living and working around the **Sea of Galilee**. And while some of us may **enjoy** fishing, I'm pretty sure that **none** of us are **professional** fishermen. None of us have received the **same call** from Jesus as the men in our text for today - a call to become one of His **apostles** - a call to be **founding members** of the New Testament Church. But there **are** some **similarities** too. **All** of us **have** been called to **follow Jesus**. And from the time of our baptism, we were also called to **live** for Jesus. That same call is actually extended to us **every day**, and just as it was with the disciples, that call to live for Jesus sometimes means making a **radical change** in our lives. Following Jesus might mean that we have to leave **behind** things that we are **used** to, and putting ourselves in a more **uncomfortable** situation. Following Jesus isn't always **easy**. Sometimes, we have to **Leave The Boat Behind** if we're going to increase our commitment and service to our Savior. Have we grown **complacent**

with our faith life? Is there **more** we can do for Jesus? Can we spend some more time in **prayer** and **Bible study**? Can we increase our **volunteer** hours in our congregation? Can we reach out to someone who doesn't **know** Jesus? I think we know the answer to **most**, if not, **all** of these questions. There's **always room** for improvement.

Decisions like those can be **difficult**, because they often mean making some kind of a **sacrifice**. Sometimes, they mean making radical **changes** in our lives. But, **whatever** the cost, it's always **worth** it. Remember the one who calls us to follow. **He** is the one who gives us the **strength** to follow, and shows us the **way** to follow. He has already won the **victory** for us by His life and death on the cross. And now He asks us to **celebrate** that victory by **following** Him, and **serving** Him with every ounce of effort that we are able to muster. Let's **Leave The Boat Behind**, and follow **wherever** our Savior leads. Amen.