

## Setting Out

Menno Mennonite Church  
January 25, 2025

**Purpose:** to explore the fullest meaning of discipleship.

**Message:** We are Christ's disciples, invited as we are to follow Jesus into growth.

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:12-25 [I will read]; Isaiah 9:1-4 (please read)

**Synopsis:** Most of the time, we read the disciples in the third person. These are the superheroes of faith who paled around with Jesus and are limited to the first 12 (or 11 depending on how you wish to parse it). We may well be *followers* of Jesus, but by in large we don't claim the title of disciple, let alone accept the charge after that to make disciples the world over. Yet here we are; we are Christ's disciples, receiving the call to be disciples and to make new disciples with all that we meet.

We often read the Gospels as a historical record of the life and times of the Jesus & the disciples (like a band history). But how do we hear differently and more fully when we read the Gospels looking for a how to on being a disciple of the God who meets us where we are and calls us to that which cannot imagine?

## Matthew 4:12-25

<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee.

<sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali.

<sup>14</sup> This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

<sup>15</sup> *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,  
alongside the sea, across the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles,*

<sup>16</sup> *the people who lived in the dark  
have seen a great light,  
and a light has come upon those  
who lived in the region  
and in shadow of death.*

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to announce,  
“Change your hearts and lives!  
Here comes the kingdom of heaven!”

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers,  
Simon, who is called Peter,  
and Andrew,  
throwing fishing nets into the sea,  
because they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> “Come, follow me,” he said,  
“and I’ll show you how to fish for people.”

<sup>20</sup> Right away, they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers,  
James the son of Zebedee and his brother John.

They were in a boat  
with Zebedee their father repairing their nets.  
Jesus called them and <sup>22</sup> immediately  
they left the boat and their father and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus traveled throughout Galilee,  
teaching in their synagogues.

He announced the good news of the kingdom  
and healed every disease and sickness among the people.

<sup>24</sup> News about him spread throughout Syria.

People brought to him  
all those who had various kinds of diseases,  
those in pain, those possessed by demons,  
those with epilepsy, and those who were paralyzed,  
and he healed them.

<sup>25</sup> Large crowds followed him from Galilee,  
the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea,  
and from the areas beyond the Jordan River.

Are you a disciple? Not a question you hear every day. Not one that I am quite sure that I have asked anyone within my living memory. Not because it is out of place but because it is just not an identity that we broadly identify with a matter of faith. It doesn't fit into our self-determined, individualistically defined meaning of what it means to be a whole person let alone a person of faith. We are not given to defining ourselves as following after anyone. That is what being a disciple is—it is the person that follows after someone else, shaping their lives in the image of the one they follow the best they may. We are far more inclined to see ourselves as believing in something, and supporting a philosophy of life that we apply the best we may. Following doesn't always come up in our theological back and forth.

Besides, we learned in Sunday school that Jesus had 12 disciples, 11 later. I was the name of the band—Jesus and the disciples—they were the originals, never to be imitated. Like John, Paul, Ringo, and George made up the Beatles, we might think the boat of being a disciple has sailed (Thaddeus like George keeps being forgotten). We make this way of being, of following after the risen Christ something which is a matter of history and trivia to be learned and the gospels a matter of recording and passing on that history for spiritual inspiration and for our study. But not to be worked with as a matter of instruction of how it might be to be to be a disciple even today.

Yet it is precisely this sort of instruction manual that we are given in the Gospels; in Matthew in particular. Just a brief orientation: this is directly before the Sermon on the mount where the new recruits begin their transformation. From the very beginning when Jesus comes and invites the first of the disciples to get up, leave everything behind, and to follow him. This continues to the end when they meet the Risen Christ and receiving their marching orders for living the life after Jesus himself would be physically returning to the Father. Time and again Jesus offers the wisdom of what it means to be a disciple. The stories and parables that we so neatly pull apart and apply as the occasion warrants form a broader whole of those who follow behind Jesus being led from where finds them as they are for what they are through the experiences and learnings of years as they were shaped into the fishers of people they were promised to be. When Jesus encounters them at the end of the course of study after the resurrection, after they had been shaped by their failures every bit as much as the times when got it right (the passion and resurrection being exhibit A). John's gospel has this scene of them getting on with life, only to be interrupted by the risen Christ welcoming them in, giving them

instructions, and sending them out. Matthew tells us about the 11 meeting Jesus in Galilee and receiving their commission to go and make disciples—to go and do the work of forming and inviting people that Jesus himself had been doing. The tradition begins. Disciples make other disciples. And on through generations it has traveled, and here we are; disciples too.

We don't often think in these terms. Not natively anyway. We have put so much ology in our theology that we can forget that what we are called to do is to be and make disciples. We come to Jesus most often because we are looking for something: healing, love, hope, salvation. It is our need that sends us in a Godward direction. It was true with Jesus in the flesh. It is equally true today if not more so. Jesus gives us all of this freely and fully. We should never artificially pit salvation and discipleship, inclining ourselves to think that one could possibly take the place of other. Jesus gives what we ask for, but it never stops there. Jesus is always inviting us into what God is doing. The great thing is that when you come to Jesus for all of these things, the invitation never stops just at what we ask for, but always continues into what Jesus offers—life more fully than what we can possibly know or imagine as Jesus invites us into learning with him what it means to be fully authentic and fully human.

This story of calling I think is emblematic of the process of setting out and getting started as disciple. I always find the action in this text amazing. Jesus comes along the lake, knows who and what he wants, and invites these guys to drop everything and follow him. And you know what? They do! They drop their nets, drop all of what they are doing and follow on with the simple promise of being fishers of people. It's amazing testimony, but I often find myself wondering what it all means. Not for a minute do I want to take away from the powerful message of faithful following that this story offers us. Just saying yes is amazing. But sometimes, I wonder whether what they had in mind when they said yes is the same thing as what they ended up experiencing. As much I admire the notion that they dropped entirely what they were doing without a backward glance, I think we lose something for not also allowing for somewhat more modest expectations when they set off here. Sure, they might have said I have a few days; I'll follow along and see where this leads. Perhaps this calling was the beginning of their journey with Jesus, the planting of the seed that became the full flower of faith that they would grow into in time. What starts as a casual experiment morphed and changed and grew in them as this seed took root and began to change them. They might have begun not quite knowing what to expect or what to commit, but then as they saw and began to understand who it

was they were following they undergo what happens to those who come and follow disciple Christ: their mind is changed, their selves are changed, and most of all their hearts are changed, until there is nothing they could even imagine that would tear them away from being the disciples that they had become. Whether they left fully convinced or merely curious to me doesn't matter. In fact it would be bit truer to human nature and natural experience if they hadn't planned this. It is the fact that they take the steps along the way that makes all the difference.

I say this because we can easily find ourselves in comparison to the stories that we heard and had heard. Of the great and good disciples being those who meet the challenge with full and unquestioning abandon. We hold ourselves to example of Peter, Andrew, James and John. We likely have our disciple stories of times where we were moved and motivated by the sense of call that lives you on our on our lives. Yet, we know that somehow it's not as all encompassing as leaving our Nets and our fathers behind. We wonder whether we measure up as disciples, really, when it comes down to it. We are far more intrigued with the romance of the absolute than the familiarity of simply growing into a way of life and the way of being.

We wonder where our way is really the right way. And whether we have been changed by the one who we follow. We do not hold disciple as part of our identity, as part of who we are and what we are called to be. It can be hard to know how to best proceed and how to best live. In the way the God is calling us. Yet the reality is that we are each disciples, we are each called, we are each following in our own way to our own ends. We may not regularly claim identity disciplines among our various activities. But we know who we have been shaped by and what we have been shaped for. We have been shaped by God and by following Jesus. We are invited to live out of those ways and means, showing God to a world desperately wanting to see Christ with us.

One of the many gifts of parenting is the completely disturbing washes of memory that come to me from time to time. Usually, it is when I say something trying to reign in what is happening at the time, or a joke to try to make people laugh, and I have a wash of realization: I have become my father. What I had promised myself would never happen. I suspect I am not alone in this. Try as I might, there is no escaping your parents, especially when you are a parent yourself. Not that it is a bad thing: I am glad to be shaped as I am and am grateful for the model. It is a compliment, I think, to be told that I remind someone of my folks. Yet it is hard not to

laugh at myself, but we cannot underestimate the power of following after someone has on our lives. We are shaped by who we follow.

We all have those people who we follow. Some we have selected, others we are quite simply stuck with, others we choose very carefully for the qualities and the character that they offer into our lives. Discipleship is one of those things that we often speak about but are not always sure how to follow along. But it is who we are and we would do well to be shaped by this. I wonder what it would be like were we better able to own the identity of being disciples together and disciples for the world each year? How would it change us to actually say this out loud and not just as a theological statement? Or, more challenging still, how would it change how we lived if we use this as our primary identity and allegiance? I think it would take us to places we have only begun to consider as ours to inhabit.

We are disciples: imperfect, confused, mistaken and scared at times. Inspired, empowered, and brave at others. Just like so many who have gone before. We are being invited into the work of coming and following behind the master. That is our call, no matter the season. What might we be ready to leave that we might follow?

So I leave you with this question: Who is it that you follow? How are you following after Christ? How might we say yes to the always present invitation to come, to follow, and to be forever changed. May we each step out onto the road and be forever changed.