

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, [a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. **2** He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. **3** He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. **7** So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" **9** For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, **10** and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." **11** So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Follow Me Anyway

My first second car, (I had three vehicles at one point in my early uneducated years). It was a project and probably not the best purchase I've ever made. I still remember buying it. It was listed at \$150.00 which already says something about kind of van I was buying. To say it needed work is an understatement. It wouldn't start. The interior as good as you could expect, there were no bodies but there were needles. The body was beat up and it burned a quart of oil every 100 miles (burned it so cleanly that it passed smog - I'm still not sure where the oil was going). The ride home was terrifying, as we flat towed it home, and my buddy raced through back roads flinging me around corners on a 20 foot chain. There was a long list of reasons not to buy this van. First there was the van, my parents, advice of friends. There was plenty wrong with it. but I bought it anyway.

Jesus wasn't in the market for a cheap van but he was looking for some fishermen: disciples. Those who would follow him, learn from him, and carry on after he ascended into heaven. You'd think Jesus would be searching for the cream of the crop, the brightest and best, those seminary students who make District President assistants but instead Jesus settles for a low end model: Simon. Simon Peter then gives Jesus every excuse as to why he should find a different disciple but Jesus responds, "Follow me anyway." It's not that Peter's defects were a good thing. They would have to be dealt with. No, Jesus called him in spite of his sin to serve.

That's the same way God works among us. He sends his word. He comes to us. We give him every excuse as to why he should move on without us but he calls us anyway. Follow me, anyway.

Up to this point Jesus has not yet called Peter into the full time ministry. Peter is aware of Jesus. John the Baptizer has pointed out to Jesus as the, "*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" But Jesus has not yet called him to be an apostle. Jesus is growing in popularity and it's no accident that Jesus is standing at the Lake of Gennesaret (aka the sea of Galilee), with people crowding against him and listening to the word of God. It was no accident when Jesus entered Peter's boat and asked him to put out a little so he could speak to the people. It was no accident that after he finished speaking he addressed Peter, "*Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.*"

Peter protests, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught a single fish. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*" They've toiled all night. The whole night was wasted and since then they've washed their nets. They fish via dragnet and a net needs to be washed every time it is let down as it picks up debris. They had just finished washing the nets and to, "*Let the nets down,*" would require them to be washed again. Besides, the time to fish was over. Peter does not yet know Jesus. Peter does not yet know the holiness of Jesus. It's at this point that he refers to him as, "Master," One who stands over another. Peter protests and finally went along without any confidence in the wisdom of this master. Fishing was Peter's business and he knew more about this subject and fishing than the carpenter who can't swim.

It's with air of arrogance that later left Peter ashamed and pleading with Jesus to leave, "Lord leave me." Peter's tune changes quick from "Master," to "Lord." Like Jonah he cannot flee from the presence of God no matter how hard he tries. God must leave him. Peter is caught in his unbelief. Caught in his pride. Caught trying to teach Jesus a lesson and for that God should leave. Peter confesses, "I'm a sinner." And not just any kind of sinner but a sinner through and through. Peter puts himself alongside tax collectors and outright sinners. If there is to be any peace with God, let alone peace of mind, God must go. But Jesus calls to him, "Follow me anyway."

That sounds a lot like a broken down beat up van I bought, "I'll take it anyway." Peter is like my van but then again so are we. Before someone thinks, "You had an awesome van!" It was awesome. It had some redeeming qualities - low to the ground, able to fit a motorcycle, and unique enough no-one else had one. But we don't have any redeeming qualities. The common consensus in this world is that we are "good people" That we can bring something good to the table. That we have something to offer that Jesus can't refuse. We may even sound like we're trying to upsell a used car when we tell Jesus, "I've given you my heart." I've accepted you into my heart. but that's not how the Bible speaks of conversion or anyone who comes to Christianity.

That's not how we are in real life either. We're sinful, full of pride and arrogance. These things come from the heart. *out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Matthew 15:19)*. Sometimes we may even strive to show someone wrong because we're experts in this area and well God just doesn't know what he's talking about. It's that same arrogance over scripture, over the Word of God that Peter attempted to prove wrong - only the Word demonstrated his sin. It's the same arrogance and pride we display in trying to prove God's Word wrong - we're not that bad. We're not that kind of people. We're not that kind of sinner. The Word of God proved Peter a sinner. We can only recognize our sinfulness in the presence of God. Only when the Holy Spirit works through the Word and convinces us of our sin and need for a savior. We are that sinful. We are in need of a Savior. God should leave us on our own.

But Jesus calls to us anyway. "Follow me anyway."

Jesus has the patience of a saint. He puts up with Peter and they pull in a load of fish. Their nets began to break and their boat begin to sink. They signal for the other boat and now both boats are so full they begin to sink. And Jesus doesn't turn to Peter and say, "Oh you of little faith. I told you so." and walk away. They were amazed and terrified. But Jesus comforts Peter, "*Don't be afraid.*" Stop doing this thing that you are doing. The only reason Jesus could tell Peter not to be afraid isn't because his sin doesn't matter, but because Jesus had come to be his source of holiness. Jesus knew Peter wasn't perfect from the beginning. Jesus knew that Peter didn't believe him to be the Lord. But he is there to lead them to believe and trust his Word.

Jesus called Peter to follow him. Peter is a disciple not because he was a great disciple but because God has made him a disciple. The Word of God and the power of Jesus have been transforming Peter. Peter responds with, "Lord." One doesn't just simply call another person Lord without opening oneself up to a stone to the head. That's blasphemy. That's a serious confession. And yet it demonstrates Jesus' Word worked. It worked again as *they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him*. Jesus led them to believe that the Word would provide for them all that they needed. Maybe that load of fish freed them from fishing and fulfilled their contract. Maybe that's what would enable them to leave their boats behind. Or maybe Jesus wrecked their nets and their boats and there was no turning back now. No matter what happened Jesus gave an abundance and he led them to believe that he was not just a healer/teacher guy but he is Lord.

They didn't fully understand at this point who Jesus was and what he would accomplish, or what following Jesus would entail but they would find out. They would see Jesus suffer and die for the sins of the world. They would see him risen from the dead. They would come to realize the tremendous gift that God had given them, as well as the cost of following him and being the apostles. They would see first hand the Word of the Lord working. They would find an abundant harvest in

the least likely places as the Word went out and the Word worked not because of them - but often in-spite of them, anyway.

Just as Jesus is patient with Peter he's also patient with us. He continues to send his Spirit to work through his Word and calls us to follow. Faith is the gift he gives leading us to believe we are forgiven, freely, fully by his work alone. His work is creating that faith, preserving you in that faith, providing you with good works to do, and rejoicing over them when you do them. That's a gift greater than a massive haul of fish. That's a greater gift than any kind of deal that you could ever get on a van.

So does that mean we should all walk away from our full time jobs and become evangelists? No. Just as John the Baptizer didn't tell people to quit being soldiers or tax collectors but to be honest and good workers so too we don't have to give up our vocation. God *has called some to be pastors and teachers* (Ephesians 4:11). That does not mean the majority or even all. That means some. That means when I presented myself for the ministry I had no idea whether or not I would receive a call. And if you, the church didn't call me, I would have gone back to the cabinet shop and installed kitchens to the glory of God. That would in no way negate the fact that you and I am part of the priesthood of all believers, that you and I can share the same powerful word of God with others.

Not everyone was called to the office of apostle. They had a high calling. The end of Luke tells us what God chose these apostles for. They were to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, starting in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria. Jesus only called twelve. So how can you be sure he has called you to be a Christian? That's easy, just look to your baptism. You are baptized. I am baptized. Are you still concerned? Hear the Word of the Lord. Because listening to the Word of God - works, read, ask questions. If there are doubts, talk about them. But the one thing we don't ever need to be is afraid that God will go back on his promise, that he won't forgive, that you are too far gone that "anyway" will come first and "I'll pass" will follow.

Follow me anyway. Even after Peter's failure, and you already know it won't be his last, Jesus still calls him into the ministry. "*To catch people alive*" is the literal translation. You don't need a net. You have God's Word. He gives you the privilege to use that Word, make it your own, and he promises that his Spirit works through that Word. You don't need to try and upsell Christianity, let the word work in your life and others as you hear the Words of Jesus, "Don't be afraid." Follow me anyway.