

What It Means to Follow Jesus

Thomas Robinson, March 27, 2011

Luke 5:1-11

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to **hear the word of God**, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw **two boats by the lake**, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was **Simon's**, he asked him to put out a little from the land. **And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.**

⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, *"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."*

⁵ And Simon answered, *"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But **at your word I will let down the nets.**"*

⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he **fell down at Jesus' knees**, saying, *"**Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.**"* ⁹ For he and all who were with him were **astonished** at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, *"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."* ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, **they left everything and followed him.**

Colossians 1:15-17 – A Hymn of Jesus' Identity

¹⁵ He is the **image of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For by **him all things were created**,
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, ...
all things were **created through him and for him.**

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Matthew 13:44-46 – Jesus' Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴ *"The **kingdom of heaven** is like **treasure hidden** in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

⁴⁵ *"Again, the **kingdom of heaven** is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding **one pearl of great value**, went and sold all that he had and bought it."*

John 21:1-9 – Jesus' Resurrection Appearance and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ... ³ Simon Peter said to [the other disciples], *"I am going fishing."*

They said to him, *"We will go with you."* They went out and got into the boat, but **that night they caught nothing.** ⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

⁵ Jesus said to them, *"Children, do you have any fish?"* They answered him, *"No."*

⁶ He said to them, *"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."* So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of **the quantity of fish.**

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, *"It is the Lord!"* When **Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord**, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and **threw himself into the sea.** ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish....

What It Means to Follow Jesus

The topic includes the whole of Christianity – community and individual. The Gospels show getting to know Jesus could lead to opposition to him or to following him – discipleship.

Beginning to follow was the beginning of discovery about him and about the disciple.

This is not just being religious around Jesus. Religiosity often uses Jesus for other purposes – personal goals, political ideology. Following aims at Jesus' purposes as Lord.

The call of Peter in Luke lets us observe some of the experiences of beginning to follow.

The experience of every disciple is particular, unique, but all in relation to the One Lord.

Following Begins in the Middle of Everyday Life

Peter is doing his job with its successes and frustrations. Jesus is not scouting the rabbinic seminaries to find well-prepared disciples. Everyone is potential. Some are called to new missions that radically change their work. Others stay apparently in the same job/life.

But for both, everything changes from within. The central purpose of life is refocused.

Career, family, relationships, all orbit around Christ at the center of everyday life.

Following Flows from Jesus' Call to Obey

Jesus gives a seemingly unreasonable command. Peter obeys "*at your word.*" Peter already senses in Jesus a startling, bold claim to guide life and action. He does not understand, but he obeys, and the adventure begins. He could refuse, claim his expertise, demand clarification. Jesus might have gone on down the beach. Jesus' word calls for trust.

This is hard for us moderns who want autonomy and self-determination, not lordship.

Following is Seeing Myself in Light of Jesus' Authority

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" When we first truly encounter God's power in Jesus, it is fearsome. We are in danger, not in control. We are judged, broken, sinful. Before, we had excused ourselves, compared with others. The closer we get to him – observe his life, listen to his teaching – the more we either want to flee from him or run to him for hope.

By following, Peter changed from fleeing from Jesus to swimming/running to Jesus (Jn 21).

Following is Learning the Reality of Jesus' Lordship

They were all "*astonished*" at what Jesus did. They had to deal with a new reality, the power, lordship, authority of Jesus. Jesus calls you. He does not entice, manipulate, coerce you. There is an astonishing respect and love that he gives us in our right to refuse him.

Still, he calls in the reality of his own holiness and power as creator who knows the loving purpose for which he created us. He sustains the whole universe by that power (Col 1:17).

He does not follow us as an assistant. We follow him as his creatures learning his love.

Though Peter was afraid, he was more fascinated and assured as he trusted Jesus.

Following is Seeing My Life Through His Eyes

"Don't be afraid, from now on you will be catching men." A call exactly for Peter the fisherman.

Jesus knows what we can become – far more than we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). He knows what makes life exciting and challenging for us, what gifts he has given us, and he calls us to use everything that we can become to serve, love, give, help, teach – to create with him the reality of a life that makes a difference here and now and that builds for eternity.

This is God's rule, the "*Kingdom of Heaven,*" – a hidden *treasure*, the *pearl* worth everything.

Following is Committing My Whole Self

"They left everything and followed him!" All those fish! The business! Jesus didn't want their stuff. He wanted them. We cannot know Jesus without risk, vulnerability, trust, love.

Jesus committed himself all out in love for us. He calls us to follow him with all that we are.