

As the gospel writer Mark tells the story, the men Jesus called to be his disciples were living productive, settled lives before they got their calling. Peter and his brother Andrew had a home, and later the text tells us that Peter's mother-in-law lived with them, which presumably means there were other family members in the house as well. When we meet these men, they are casting nets into the sea because they are fishermen. James and his brother John were in a boat with their father Zebedee. They were mending their nets because they were also fishermen. Apparently, they were doing well enough to have hired help on the boat.

The smell of fish was permanently on the hands of these four men. And the smell of the sea was a part of every breath they had taken. This was the life they knew, and they lived it every day, year after year.

Then on one ordinary day Jesus walked by and said, "Follow me." We're told that all four of them immediately dropped everything and followed him. At this point, the reader of this text has to interrupt the narrative to ask, "Where are they going? What about their jobs? How will they pay their bills? What about their families and old man Zebedee who they left in the boat?" The way Mark has written the story, these men don't have answers to any of these reasonable questions.

These are not conversion stories as we are accustomed to reading. These fishermen are not penitent sinners. That comes later. Nor are they intellectually convinced of the truth claims Jesus is making. That comes much later. And they don't start following Jesus for any of the reasons we usually associate with finding a calling. It's not because Jesus says he needs their help being the Messiah. The Son of God doesn't need help. It's not because they have a burden for where following Jesus will lead them in life. They have no idea where Jesus is leading them.

The only clue we get to why they would immediately drop everything and leave the life they knew to follow Jesus is found in the promise he makes: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." In other words, he would transform them from fishermen into those who could now catch people, so they could make a difference with their lives.

Who doesn't want this? Eventually you get to the point when you realize that life's meaning comes not from getting a promotion from being Assistant Vice President to the Associate Vice President, or from getting the second home, or from eventually getting into the more exclusive retirement center. It's not that these are bad things to achieve, but you know it's never going to satisfy your soul. You've always looked for more out of life than the things we can get for ourselves.

What we all want is to think that our lives are making a difference, even in some small way, to the lives of others. We want to catch not just fish, or bigger deals, or more trophies. We want to catch the people around us who are falling into despair, holes they cannot climb out of, and dangerous illusions about life.

We want our lives to matter, to have impact, to make a difference. Maybe you can make a difference in the life of a child. What a wonderful way to spend a life—raising the next generation with fabulous dreams. Or maybe you can make a difference to your colleagues at work. Over and over, we hear the greatest reason for job satisfaction comes not from the work we do, but from the people with whom we work. Or maybe you are looking for a calling that has nothing to do with how you earn a living and everything to do with caring about something important, like the ministries of the church or the pathos of the poor who are just looking for a break.

If you were the kind of person whose only goal was to collect more money, you wouldn't be wasting your time in church. No, you're the kind who would love for your obituary to read that "This person made a difference to others." And you yearn for some sense of that along the way in life.

That is exactly what Jesus has promised. Your life can make a difference, but the promise comes at a cost—you have to follow him. And that means you must be willing to leave the familiar life behind.

Hasn't that always been the cost of finding your life? Imagine how small your life would be if you never left your parents' home. It was familiar. It may have been a familiar delight or a familiar misery, which could have been true of these first disciples as well. We have no idea if they loved or hated their lives as fishermen. It doesn't matter. It can be as hard to leave a familiar misery as it is to leave behind a familiar delight. Either way, the high adventure began when you left the family and set out on the road called *your* life.

As your maturity began, so does it continue. We don't make the big move once. Life is a constant process of following Jesus who leads us to new places, and he never offers travel brochures for us to ponder or sits down with a map with us so we can chart the course together. Who among us is living the life we planned when we were eighteen? For most, that's a good thing because along the strange ways we were called to go we found our lives being transformed. And the biggest transformations came when we found ways of making a difference.

It is amazing how much movement there is in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah left their home in Ur of the Chaldeans to spend the rest of life following a dream that God gave them. Later their descendants, the Hebrew people, learned faith in God while being on the move from slavery to the Promised Land. It was when they settled in that land that their problems started, and when they were again on the move in exile their renewal in faith saved their identity. David was at his best when he was on the move being chased by Saul, and again his greatest sins came when he had settled down as a king. Jesus was always on the move, and the most wonderful miraculous things happen to people along the way. He never settled down and never incorporated an organization with by laws, clergy, and officers. (Well, he did try to have a treasurer but that didn't work out very well.) What he created was a movement, not a religion. His church began at Pentecost when the Spirit blew the disciples out the Upper Room into the waiting world, and we never again hear of them in the New Testament as disciples. Now they are apostles—people who are sent. The Book of Acts and the epistles depict a church that is growing because it is constantly changing. It's hard to find anyone in the Bible who is being changed, transformed without being on the move.

Now, this move isn't always geographical. Sometimes it is our relationships that are in motion as the "us" of today is not the "us" of yesterday. Sometimes it is our bodies that are aging, changing, maybe seeming strange to us. Sometimes it is our jobs or the world around us that is in constant flux. And sometimes it is the church that like all living organisms is either changing and growing... or dying. If you are wondering what 2024 will bring for you, I can answer that—change.

Often the changes are unwanted. But every change presents you with a choice. Will you allow the inevitable changes in life to transform you, or will you waste your life as a victim trying to cling to what you cannot keep? Will you believe that the one who began a good work in you isn't done because the Savior has so much more to show you, about you, down the road?

The point of following Jesus is not to be led to a place, and certainly not back to a place where you can settle down. The point of following Jesus is to follow Jesus. That's the call.

Along the way he transforms our lives as we find ourselves making a difference, which is another reason why we call him Savior. Amen.