Text: Matthew 4:12-25

**Introduction**

Matthew, Mark and Luke – called the synoptic gospels because they roughly tell the same story with the same beats – are usually divided into two parts. Part 2 is the passion in Jerusalem. Part 1 is the Galilean ministry. In human terms, how we naturally would score things, the Galilean ministry is the success. The Jerusalem ministry ends on the cross. Death, in human terms, is usually the worst outcome. The resurrection is the event that tells us of the divergence of human judgement and God’s judgement. Often what we might consider success, would be failure to God; and what we consider absolute failure, is what is most pleasing to God.

Having that in mind is probably a good idea if we are going to meditate on discipleship. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

**Text**

The very first answer should come from the first preaching we have from Jesus, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” The first of Luther’s 95 theses states, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said repent, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.” The next 94 theses lay out how the church of Luther’s day had completely obscured and misunderstood what repentance means. They read it as “do penance”, the sacrament of confession which had inserted works of penance between confession and absolution. And in time had offered short-cuts to those works of penance, like buying an indulgence. And if you hadn’t done penance here and now, you would do that penance in purgatory. The fundamental act of grace had thereby – slowly and then quickly when Rome wished to build St. Peter’s – become a work of the law. A work of the law that would extend even beyond the grave. St. Peter don’t you call me cause I can’t go, I owe my soul to the company store. The free proclamation of grace, was turned into an eternal accounting gig.

Of course 500 years have given us a firm confidence that we understand what repentance means. And I think that we do have solid doctrinal statements that help us and point us in the right directions. (Of course they did too.) But for me this is probably the task of discipleship, to learn what Repent means. Being a disciple of Jesus, following Jesus, is first and always a learning of repentance.

And the first story of those called to be disciples, of those called to follow Jesus, has some interesting comparisons. You have two sets of brothers: Andrew and Simon (called Peter), and James and John the sons of Zebedee. Both groups of brothers are fishermen. But it is the contrast that we might miss. Andrew and Peter are poor fishermen. By that I don’t mean that they couldn’t catch fish, but that their equipment was rudimentary. They had some cheap nets, stood on the shore or maybe waded out as far as they could stand, and threw the net. By repeated throwing they would hope to catch a few small fish that had swam close. Not much different that you or I taking a pole, casting it from the pier, and seeing if we get a bite. James and John in contrast have a boat. And they have nets that are substantial – worth mending. Think of this as Zebedee and Sons, Inc. They are shoving off into the sea looking for much bigger fish. (There is a reason in the 2nd half of the story John is inside the priestly court at the trial of Jesus while Peter is outside and at a distance. Zebedee and Sons are respectable merchants. Peter is scaping a living together.) Maybe today Zebedee and sons would be on Wicked Tuna.

As I said it is the comparison that is interesting. The call to discipleship can go to the poor just scraping by. It likewise can go to those who might be considered comfortable in the world. The equal call was given to Andrew and Peter, James and John. Differences that the world considers very important, to Jesus are quite meaningless. Things the world would consider successful and necessary, God just doesn’t seem to care.

It was a standing joke between me and the Congregation President of my last Parish about how our outreach to the Doctor and Lawyer community was going. The gallows humor of a congregation always 2 weeks from not paying the bills. But it was also more than just gallows humor. It was our mutual recognition that as fishers of men we threw the nets and the Lord provided the catch. The net of the gospel catches all kinds. We had a calling to those gathered and where we had been planted.

But beyond the mystery of who the net catches which is the mystery of election, there is an expected equal response of the call to discipleship. The disciple – the follower of Jesus – leaves behind the things of the world. Peter and Andrew leave their nets. Likewise James and John leave the boat – and their father – and followed him. The level of leaving in worldly terms is quite different, to Jesus it appears the same.

And I think this might be the modern American church’s biggest problem – its worldliness. Jesus talks about this in various places later. He calls one who responds, “I just bought a field.” He calls another, “let me go bury my father.” Some others come up to him desperate to follow. One gets the cryptic response that “the son of man has no place to lay his head”, another gets told to give it all away and leaves brokenhearted. Following Jesus, the life of discipleship, if it means anything, means being willing to leave behind worldliness.

Now what do I mean by worldliness? What I mean is the answer to the question: who do you fear, love or trust above all things? I don’t mean an asceticism for asceticism sake. I’m not advocating monks, although our reflection of monks is the medieval twisting into works instead of a radical dependence upon God. What I tend to call the divine duh, “Do not worry about what you will eat or wear, you Father knows you need these things.” It also comes up where Jesus talks about wealth and the camel and the needle’s eye…but all things are possible with God.

Most likely the first repentance of the disciple – and maybe the last one – is from not believing either of those things. Not believing that the Father does know and does give us exactly what we need from his providence. Not believing that all things are possible. That what has been given is from God. We have a deep tendency to hold onto the things of the world or the things that we think allow us to exist in this world. Be that boats, or nets, or Fathers. We don’t think of all of these as means of God’s providence. We fear their loss more than losing Christ. We love them more dearly than the one who gave them to us. As if he won’t restore them on the final day. Even though they need mending, we trust our broken worldly things more than the eternal God who mends all things.

To follow Jesus, to be a disciple, is to learn to repent of worldliness and expect all good things from God’s hand in his time.

And the Galilean ministry, as the rest of our Gospel lesson summarizes, is a demonstration of the character and trustworthiness of Christ. What does Jesus do while here?

He proclaims the gospel of the Kingdom and heals every disease and every affliction.

Now we, after the Jerusalem part of the story, simply read the gospel of the Kingdom about that cross and resurrection. Which it is. But what was the gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed before that?

God knows. God cares. God is present and acting. For you.

God knows what you need, and he provides. Daily Bread.

God cares about your plight, and he acts to deliver you. From the Exodus to the return from exile to the deliverance from evil.

God is present. In exactly the ways that he promised.To US, nn Word and Sacrament and Prayer.

And so that you might believe that the Son of Man has authority over Sin and Death and the Devil, he cast out the demons, and healed the paralytics.

The Word of Jesus about our Father is completely trustworthy.

Yes, the world will tell you it isn’t. The world will tell you Christ is nothing but a lie. But do any of the promises of the world ever turn out to be anything beyond wishes on the monkey’s paw? Is the world ever there exactly when you need it?

Repent and follow. The life of discipleship is not the bed of roses the world will promise. The Son of Man has no place to lay his head. But it is completely trustworthy. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. A Kingdom prepared for you.