



I have such a good time meeting new people  
who have no idea who I am.

Mostly because when people who don't know you,  
one of the first questions  
that will come up in conversation is,  
'what do you do?'

And I love answering this because  
it is surprising to most people.

Truth be told, I used to hate it  
—especially when I was younger and single—  
but the gray hairs at my temple  
and my secure marital status  
have boosted my confidence.

It isn't readily apparent what I do—

I don't wear a clerical collar  
—though I have one  
in case Rebecca needs it  
-see what I did there?

But I would wager that most of us  
don't have a uniform  
that would give away what we do;  
some of the only exceptions to this  
are people like police officers,  
the medical profession and the  
City of Hickory workers—  
because they have those ball caps that say,  
City of Hickory.

For better or for worse,  
even if it shouldn't,

our jobs play a big role in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

We are in a way,  
defined by what we do.

If you are a preschool teacher,  
we'd assume that you have a love for children.

If you are a bartender  
we might assume  
you tolerate people well  
and are a night owl.

If you were a chef,  
we'd assume you like to cook, eat and entertain.

I got a text message this week

from someone whose adult daughter and husband  
were moving back to Hickory.

This mother texted me  
and wanted me to keep a look out  
for any houses that might be for sale  
in our neighborhood.

I sent a text back with some information  
and she was shocked at how much I knew.

I told her, my passion,  
aside from the ministry,  
was real estate.

First Jesus, then real estate.

Maybe in another life I told her,

I'd be a real estate agent

—but you know

a real estate agent for Jesus.

Which brings me to our passage today.

I love the job aspect in this story.

I like that Peter, Andrew, James and John  
were fishing.

I don't really know much  
of anything about fishing—  
but I'm sure that in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction is inspired from Micah Jackson, A Fisherman for Jesus <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5e1f2f646615fb89ce000068/micah-jackson-a-fisherman-for-jesus>

it was a family job,  
    (after all James and John  
        were fishing with their dad)  
        but I imagine fishing  
            to be a long hour's kind of job,  
            a job that plenty of men did;  
                a pretty recognizable kind of job.

They may not have had  
    the signature Gordan's Fisherman  
        yellow slicker and hat;  
I imagine these fishermen in clothing that stayed wet;  
    calloused hands, tanned faces;  
        and the smell—  
    there probably wasn't any guess work  
about what these men did.



When Jesus steps into the scene,  
    these soon-to-be disciples  
        are plugging away at their jobs;  
            their monotonous, sometimes boring,  
            sometimes frustrating  
                and maybe back-breaking jobs.  
                    When Jesus calls out to them,  
                        they are not in church attending worship.  
                    They aren't at a prayer meeting  
                        at Lydia's house.  
            They aren't on a mission trip  
                to Syria.  
    They aren't at home  
    reading their Bibles.

They were in their hometowns  
    doing their own thing.

Jesus's call to them,  
involved a call to keep on doing  
what they were doing,  
but with a new focus.  
Fishing for people.

When this passage comes up,  
we tend to zoom on the bit, '  
<sup>20</sup>*Immediately* they left their nets  
and followed him;'  
I think this trips a lot of us up.  
We get hung up on it.  
James and John leave their boat,  
their job,  
their family.  
Peter and Andrew drop their nets  
and walk away.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes,  
"Could you do it?  
If a clear call  
were to come to you  
tomorrow afternoon,  
could you get up from your chair  
and walk out the door,  
without taking your keys  
or turning off the lights?"

Could you abandon your grocery cart  
in front of the frozen food case at the [Lowe's]  
and set off for parts unknown  
without stopping to call home?"<sup>2</sup>

That's hard to answer  
and I bet most of us would say, no,  
I'm not sure I could do it.  
It is only the work of God  
that these men left everything  
and followed Jesus.  
BBT calls it miraculous and she's right.

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Miracle on the Beach*, found in *Home By Another Way* (Cowley Publications, Lanham, Maryland 1999 pg.38)

But what could be equally surprising  
is not that they followed him,  
but that Jesus picks them in the first place.



In the 1<sup>st</sup> century  
following a rabbi was distinct profession.  
Students went out and sought a rabbi.  
If the rabbi thought a student  
had any promise,  
the rabbi would then interview him.  
Only the best of the best  
would make the cut.  
You see everyone started out in Jewish school,  
but after about the age of 10 or so,  
if you didn't really show signs  
for an aptitude toward higher learning  
or becoming a scholar or rabbi,  
you stopped your schooling and training.  
You went back home;  
you'd have a decent understanding of Torah  
but you were sent back home  
to take up the family profession  
or to find a job.  
If you made the first cut,  
at around 10 years old,  
there were two more rounds of cuts to come  
before you would be eligible  
to seek out a rabbi.

So, if you are a fisherman it meant,  
you weren't already following a rabbi  
which meant that somewhere along the way,  
you were told to that your education was done.

Only the best went on from there  
to continue studying and learning;  
only the best of the best  
went on to look for a rabbi to follow.

To follow a rabbi  
meant you wanted to be like that rabbi.  
And if a rabbi chose you,  
it meant the rabbi thought you  
had what it would takes to be like him.  
Students would study  
what their rabbi did;  
how he interpreted the scriptures,  
so, they could do what the rabbi does.

Think like their rabbi,  
act like their rabbi.

Be like their rabbi.

Rob Bell says that a common phrase was,  
to be covered in the dust  
of your rabbi,  
—to follow him so closely,  
even the dust from his sandals  
would cover you.

But here is Jesus a very odd rabbi.  
For one he goes out  
recruiting people to follow him  
which wasn't how it was done;  
and two, he starts  
by recruiting fisherman,  
not students, very odd.

Because what do fishermen know  
about following a rabbi?

Jesus finds these four men fishing,  
doing their job.  
He does not find them

in the synagogue studying.  
He does not find them  
with their noses deep in a scroll  
debating over words  
with other students and rabbis.  
Jesus seeks out the B team,  
the JV, the bench sitters,  
the fisherman and  
he calls out to them, follow me.<sup>3</sup>  
Everyone must have been thinking,  
do you really expect your message  
to get out that way Jesus?  
Do you really expect  
that these fishermen  
will do a good job;  
are they the ones  
to help you carry the good news  
of God's kingdom to all of Israel?

And so even though  
Matthew records the miracle  
of them dropping everything immediately,  
the other side of the miracle  
is that Jesus sees something in these fishermen,  
these guys who didn't make the cut;  
Jesus sees something in them  
that makes him think  
they could be like him;  
they could do the things he does;  
they could act like him,  
be like him.  
And they are just fisherman.

In choosing these four,  
Jesus ushers in a new way  
to follow the rabbi.  
He is saying this new way  
of seeing God is open to everyone.

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<sup>3</sup> Rob Bell, Nooma Video series, Dust <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM3qHBAekhg>

His recruitment says  
that you don't have to be  
the best of the best to follow him;  
to be like him;  
to join in this good news.

You don't have to be  
the brightest student  
or the top of the class.

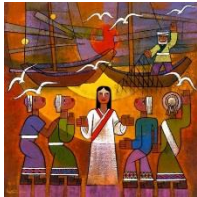
You don't have to be the fastest runner  
or the top salesmen.

You don't have to be the best preacher,  
the best teacher,  
the best anything.

This rabbi believes in these poor fishermen enough  
to trust them to tell everyone the good news.

Which means he also trusts you and me enough  
to call us to be like him  
no matter what we do.

Fishing for people.



Jesus isn't going to call all of us to be missionaries.

We aren't all called to be ministers.

We aren't all called to be Soup Kitchen directors  
or Salvation Army Shelter managers.

Instead, Jesus has decided to call to us  
right where we are.

Teachers, mothers, dentists, lawyers,

IT specialists, accountants, therapists,

PA's, operations managers,

small business owners, retirees...fishermen.

Just like these four,

Peter, Andrew, James and John.



What I see here,  
is an invitation to keep on doing  
whatever it is you do,  
but for Jesus.

A realtor for Jesus.  
A preschool teacher for Jesus.  
A factory manager for Jesus.  
A library assistant for Jesus.

The call to follow Jesus,  
to learn from him,  
to be like him,  
to do the things he did  
—that call comes to us  
right where we are.

Barbara Brown Taylor,  
early in her discernment over careers,  
wrestled to hear and makes sense  
of what she was to do with her life.

Here's what happened:

“I was in my twenties, studying for a graduate degree in divinity without any idea what I would do with it in the end. All of my classmates seemed so much more mature and focused than I was. They knew where they wanted to go in their lives and the steps they had to take to get there. All I knew was that I wanted to know more about God, and that I liked being with people who wanted to know the same thing.

There was an abandoned Victorian mansion next door to the divinity school that had once housed the Culinary Institute of America, but the Institute had moved on and the university hadn't decided what to do with the property yet. I loved walking around over there after dark, and the top landing on the three-story fire escape was one of my favorite places to pray. I could see the whole city from up there, and no one could sneak up on me without me hearing first.

So, on the night I am thinking of, I begged God to tell me what to do with my life—to give me some clear direction I could follow, or at least a nudge in the right direction. I really, really wanted to know what I was supposed to be doing, and I was ready to accept any answer. If God

wanted me to go halfway around the world and dig latrines, I was ready to do it. If God wanted me to get a Ph.D. and teach college, I was ready to do that, too. I just wanted an answer—and I got one! —but not at all what I expected.

While I was straining to hear God’s voice, this thought came into my head that I did not recognize as my own thought, because what it said to me was so different from anything I would have thought to say to myself. It said, “Do whatever pleases you, and belong to me.” Since those words were for me, not anyone else, I don’t expect them to hit anyone else the way they hit me, but the effect on me was divinely liberating.”<sup>4</sup>

“Do whatever pleases you.”

Be exactly who you are;  
be lots of things in your life;  
but do them all with  
and for Jesus.

Listen for him to call you to follow him,  
doing what you know how to do.  
And if you have chosen to follow this rabbi,  
be like him.

Study what he does,  
how he treats people,  
how he talks about God  
and then try your hardest  
to be like him in all that you do.

And be covered in the dust of your rabbi.

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, interview in 2016 <https://womenforone.com/barbara-brown-taylor/> Similar story appears in *The Preaching Life* (Cowley Publications, Cambridge, MA 1993) pg.22-23