

## An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

Matthew 4:18-22

Daily by mail and email, we receive invitations. A new store is opening, and you are invited to see. A friend is getting married, and you are invited to share in the celebration. Your class is having a reunion, and you are invited to attend.

There is an invitation of a divine kind that cuts through history and transcends time. It is an invitation to Christian Discipleship. The risen Christ invites you to a personal, daily relationship with him. A faithful friend, Jesus, asks you today, “Will you follow me? Will you go with me all the way?”

By the waters of baptism, we are cleansed and claimed as children of God. By the rivers of life, we are called and challenged to follow Jesus—to go with him all the way. Jesus is calling you today to: COME AND SEE. Check out the scene.

When Jesus was the new prophet on the block, he was hanging out with John the Baptist down by the Jordan River. One day some of John’s disciples were following Jesus from afar. They were curious about this new guy who had come on the scene. As they followed him from a distance, Jesus turned to them and said, “What are you looking for?” That day, two people went home with Jesus to discover a new way of life.

Some of you feel just as uncomfortable in church as I do in a Victoria’s Secret store. You are a little shaky in this room. You do not know the songs, you are not familiar with the prayers, and you wonder why the person up front wears weird clothes every Sunday. Yet, something inside you is longing for someone outside of you to show you the real meaning of life. Jesus is saying to you, “Come and see.” Check out the scene. Survey the territory. Take your time. Ponder the possibilities. Give it a try. Follow your heart. It might mean more than you can imagine. I say to you, “Come and see.”

It’s time to RISE AND FOLLOW. To take a step into the River of Life.

For the first disciples the invitation was Come, Follow, Was there ever an invitation more profoundly simple and simply profound? To follow is to go, to move, to come after, to comprehend, to conform, to comply, to pattern, to penetrate, to pursue that calling that is bigger than I. Immediately they follow. I would have asked, “How far? How long? How much? What is the salary? What are the benefits?” They just started walking.

If somebody came and asked you today, “Are you a Christian?” you would most likely say, “Yes.” But, if I asked you a different question, it becomes intensely personal, “Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?” Where Christ leads will you follow? Will you go with Christ all the way? It is that personal relationship that Jesus sought with those fishermen that day. Salvation is a gift, but discipleship is a dynamite decision. The turning point in any life is when we stop inventing the God we want and start following the God who is. Today Christ is saying to us, “Come. Come follow me.”

Peter and his buddies had fished all night and had caught nothing. Whether or not you have ever wet a line in the water, you know that feeling of failure. You try, but you miss the mark. Elisha Otis invented the elevator, but he failed three times as a mechanic. Ernest Hemingway wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*. But

he got forty-six rejection slips from his publisher. Fred Astaire's first screen test was evaluated this way: "Can't sing, can't act, can dance a little." You know what it is, the taste of failure.

Peter and his buddies were washing their nets. When a stranger came along, and asked, "Catch anything?" and Peter hadn't caught anything. As he mumbles in response while tending to his nets and adjusting his oar, the stranger doesn't condemn him for failure, but rather says to him, "Push out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." That day they learned to fish in a new place, in a new way, in a new kind of power.

My friends, if you are here today feeling futile with your faith, if you have tried and failed at it, if you have become bored with church and wonder when it is going to be over, if you find yourself pushing to the edge toward the exit, there is one who is coming to you today who is greater than I and he says, "Push out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. There is better fishing out here yet."

Dig into The Book. Learn to pray. Discover your spiritual gifts. Take on some ministry that is bigger than you, that you can't possibly do unless God does it. That is the kind of faith we need. Push out into the deep and let down your nets. Dive in deeper.

If you are going to know the fullness of God's goodness and grace, you have to turn loose of control and let the God take you wherever it is that God is guiding you. God has taken me places I could not imagine in my life. Oh yes, I have fallen more than once, yet God has reached down into the depths and pulled me back in. I have been in over my head almost all my life, but the loving One, the kind and gentle Savior, has always picked me up and helped me go. Jesus of Nazareth requests the honor of your discipleship today. Jesus said, "If anyone would be my disciple, let them deny themselves, take up a cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

Jesus says, Go fishing. I will make you fishers of persons. To be fishers of people, we must use the right word, at the right time, in the right way, to the right person, for the right reason, has powerful results. To a new person in our neighborhood, we might say, So you're new in town. I'm glad you are here. Have you found a place to shop? Have you found a place to get your hair cut? By the way, I go to church at HSCC. I'd love to pick you up on Sunday and you can come with me."

To a troubled friend we might say, "I know things are tough right now. When I have walked through the valley, the strength of God has sustained me and helped me there." The right word, at the right time, for the right reason, in the right way, to the right person creates a wonderful follower of Christ.

If you want to go fishing, you must be willing to wait. In God's time, God makes all things beautiful. Don't catch to kill, net to release. We do not want trophies on the wall, but partners in the pool who are determined to pursue the will of God. Jesus of Nazareth invites you to be a faithful disciple today.

When Christ calls you, arise and follow fast. Christ's way may lead through darkness, but it comes to light at last.