



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Following and Fishing

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MATTHEW 4:18-20

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*<sup>18</sup>Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup>And He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.*

*Matthew 4:18-20*

### TO FOLLOW

I like beginnings and this passage of scripture marks an important beginning as Jesus calls his first disciples, men who will eat, sleep, live with and learn from him during his life on earth, then share his message with the world after his death and resurrection. It is likely the first disciples called by Jesus had strong religious beliefs based upon the Old Testament. They were aware of and anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Still, what a watershed moment in the lives of two simple fishermen this must have been.

Imagine the reaction today if someone you didn't know or someone you know of, but haven't met, approached you and says, "Follow me."

What do you think the most likely response would be? Where are we going? What are we going to do? How long will we be gone? Just a second, let me check my calendar. I'm free on Tuesday, but I have to be back by 5:00pm for soccer practice. If you happen to be fishing, and the fishing's good, forget it! However, when Jesus called the scripture says, "**Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.**" (John 10:27) "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me." Now let's look at it from another perspective. Have you ever asked anyone to follow you? I have – on more than one occasion. It usually starts with something you believe to be a good cause and you feel in your heart that something has to be done and you just know that others share your beliefs. You sound the call to action, draw your sword and charge onto the battlefield. As you are about to engage the enemy (or issue) you look around you – and realize you are alone.

To truly follow, to really follow, especially in the spiritual sense, is hard. It goes against our nature. We like order; we have a human need for a predictable life. In fact, we often tend to associate the unexpected events in our lives with bad things, job loss, marital hardship, a tragic accident, a crippling illness, the loss of a loved one.

So we play it safe trusting in ourselves and our past experiences, not able to open our hearts to the direction of the Holy Spirit. I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Follow me." (Hebrews 11:1) "**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**"

Have you ever hiked up a narrow trail through the woods with friends? If you are following the other members of the group, you can't always see where you are going, but must put your trust in the person leading you. You surrender and give up control of certain things, trusting that the leader will keep you out of poison ivy, away from yellow jacket nests and bears, and not walk you over a cliff somewhere. You place your faith in the hike leader's ability to keep you safe, provide you with an enjoyable experience and lead you to your destination. When the hike ends who then do we place our trust in? Who do we follow?

It would be a stretch to compare Simon Peter and Andrew to modern day professionals with \$50,000 bass boats and hundreds of thousands of dollars in lucrative product endorsements. But they were fishermen, spending their days outdoors on the sea under blue skies and bright sunshine. The work was hard but in those days it could have been a lot worse. It would not have been an easy decision for them to leave the life they were familiar with and follow this person who professed to be the one, the living word.

It might have been easier if Jesus had asked the Disciples to follow him to some familiar destination. For the first disciples following Christ was not a singular event but a lifelong journey that required an immediate act of faith. Every day, in fact every moment was filled with new revelations and amazing experiences. To follow, our commitment of faith must be the same, immediate, every moment, every day for life.

When it comes to choosing to follow, who had or has the harder choice? The first disciples had only the Old Testament to look to for guidance, but they had the Son of God himself before them.

Today's disciples have not only the prophecies of the Old Testament but also the inspired, perfect historical record of the life and purpose of Jesus Christ to compare it to. For all Disciples following is an act of faith.

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### INTERIM BIBLE STUDY

TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 12:00 NOON

TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

# West Virginia

## Following and Fishing

### TO FISH

There are many things Jesus could have said to convince the disciples to give up life as they knew it. He could have just said, "Follow me" and left it at that or he could have proclaimed what was to come. Follow me and watch me give sight to the blind, heal the sick, feed the hungry, cast out demons, control the elements and raise the dead. Follow me and see me die on the cross and rise from the grave. Follow me and together we will change the history of the world forever. What an exciting, amazing prospect that would have been to potential followers. Every promise would have been true and the disciples did eventually experience all those things and the history of the world was changed forever. But Jesus didn't offer any of that, he only said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." We know today just how important Jesus' words were, for from this simple beginning the disciples multiplied greatly and the gospel spread. We likely wouldn't be here today in bible study if it hadn't.

### FEAR AND FAILURE

For many of us, sharing ones faith can be a difficult part of being a Christian. We gladly accept Jesus' command to follow but are fearful of and neglect leading others to him. Are our fears justified and what risks might we face? We could face outright rejection. We may be ridiculed. We could be ostracized from groups we have been a part of all of our lives. We will fail. And in some places around the world we could be imprisoned, exiled, tortured or even put to death for sharing our faith. In America today, we are not likely to be physically harmed or face death for sharing our beliefs but we do have our own obstacles to overcome, especially those that are self imposed. I believe one of the greatest obstacles is our fear that we will be rejected, especially by those who know us well, because we are deemed to be unworthy. Just thinking about it is enough to stop me dead in my tracks. So what do we do, what is the answer?

The first thing we might do is thank God for this great opportunity. If this is a problem for you personally or a concern others voice, acknowledge it, accept it and move forward. It's true! If I have learned anything from our studies it would be that I am not a good person. I am not worthy. I am a sinner and there is only one way to overcome that indisputable reality. Isn't that a great place to

start the conversation? Personally, I would like to think of myself as a work in progress, something my wife will enthusiastically verify.

This is in no way implying that we should not strive to be a positive example to others and live our lives accordingly. But effective witness cannot be about you. It has to be about the needs of those you would witness to. The answer for them and the assurance for you will always be found in the word of God. That is where we direct the conversation. (John 8:31-32) To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

There are definitely risks we face and will likely experience as "fishers of men." But will we persist? If you have ever gone fishing there should be at least one important lesson gained from the experience, you are not going to catch a fish on every cast! In fact, if you happen to be a muskie fisherman you will only average one fish per thousand casts. (An extreme but true example) In between catches you will face adversity. If you fish, you will cast lures into trees or snag them on the bottom, your line might break costing you your favorite lure (they are not cheap these days) and yes you are going to hook the big one and yes he is going to get away. When I was a kid, "going fishing" meant grabbing a bamboo cane pole, a can of worms and heading to the farm pond. Today we do everything we can in advance of our fishing trip to prepare for success. Depending upon what we are fishing for, we choose the right rod and reel, the correct line weight and an assortment of lures. We check the weather conditions and water level and clarity. These are the things we can control and avid fishermen take them seriously. Yet, in spite of our best efforts to prepare there always remains one thing we can't control and that is what happens when we cast. It could be a good outcome, a bad outcome or no outcome at all. Regardless of the outcome, serious fishermen continue to prepare, endure adversity and they keep fishing. That is an approach worth considering as we overcome fear and failure while fishing for men. (II Timothy 4:5) "***Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the good news, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.***"

# West Virginia

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### LIFE VS ETERNAL LIFE

Seldom a week goes by that I don't read about or see on the television news a story of heroism involving ordinary people risking injury or even death to save the life of another. A young child alone in a burning house, teenagers falling through the ice on a frozen pond, an automobile crash victim trapped in a car about to explode and most recently those in a Colorado movie theatre alive today because someone was willing to risk everything to save a fellow human being. There is no doubt in my mind that most of us here today would do the same. We wouldn't hesitate, even if it was a total stranger. You see we value the human life, it is a precious commodity. Should we not value eternal life even more? (John 6:63) Jesus said "***The spirit gives life: the flesh counts for nothing, the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.***"

Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to the collective souls of mankind. "I didn't know" won't cut it on judgment day as we see in Romans 1: 18-20:

***<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.***

But what of those who do know and don't share the gospel? What of those who have lived an abundant life overflowing with God's blessings, yet are unwilling to share the good news? When you miss an opportunity to lead others to Christ the stakes are high. "***Most assuredly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.***" (John 5:24)

### IS THERE A NEED FOR OUR WITNESS AND HOW DO WE BEGIN?

Recent results from the American Religious Identification Survey find that the percentage of self identified Christians has fallen 10 percentage points since 1990 and the number of people willing to describe themselves as atheist or agnostic has increased nearly four times.

You may be thinking I am just one person, how can I make a difference against such an overwhelming trend? In Gilmer County we have a small pond on our farm. I go there often and on quiet days I will sit on the bank, occasionally casting small stones into the pond. Isn't it amazing what happens as the waves created by the stones entry into the water spread across the surface? Such a small act, such a big impact. We can be like that. In Daniel Henderson's book, "Keeping Perspective" he shares a quote that may help our focus. It reads "To the world you may just be one person, but to one person you may be the world." Today's societal demands and ambitions can be almost overwhelming, hindering our ability to tune in to the needs of just one person at a time. To overcome the constant distraction requires personal focus. To illustrate my point, let me share with you a National Geographic moment involving lions and zebra. Lions are formidable predators. Zebras however are not without their own defenses and in fact survive most lion attacks. They do so because they are herd animals, that when attacked scatter in all directions, braying, snorting and kicking up dust, creating a striped swirl of confusion. The lion must ignore the chaos around him and select one target. If he doesn't, he goes hungry. We must be like the successful lion. Pick one, win one! If we can do that and meaningfully touch just one soul for eternity we can make a difference.

### YOU HAVE THE CHOICE

***If you are going to follow, you are going to have to fish!*** The two go together and if you commit to one you must commit to both. Are you ready to follow and lead others to Christ? If you do, you will not be alone. Jesus did not say, "Follow me and you will be become fishers of men." He said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Are we not charged with emulating the life of Jesus? Has he asked us to do anything he himself didn't do during his ministry on earth? His life is the example we must follow and that includes sharing his gospel of love. We are not here to be the "personal savior", we are here to let God use us to bring others to him. Ask God to help you and listen to His voice. He will provide the opportunities. There is nothing to be afraid of, start with one person, plant the seed or create the ripple and the results may not always be immediate or even witnessed by you, but you will not fail for God will be with you. (II Timothy 1:7) (Acts 1:8)