

Jesus Calls Four Fishermen
Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.
(English Standard Version – ESV)

Background:

- Fishing nets were probably made of rope or cords woven from flax, papyrus or hemp. It is thought that the casting net had a narrow end pulled by the boat and a wide end sunk by leads (contrast the larger dragnet of Matthew 13:47).
- The fish of the Sea of Galilee included large carp, which would be dried, then salted or pickled to preserve them. Most Jews living in Palestine depended on salted fish, as well as wheat and barley for sustenance.
- Fishermen were central to the Galilean economy and made a good living by the standards of their culture, far better than the large numbers of peasants who worked the land throughout much of the Roman Empire. Therefore, James and John left behind a good job. More shocking is that they suddenly left behind their father and the family business. Such abandonment could easily bring them dishonor in the community, because many Jewish teachers of that time believed the greatest commandment was to honor one’s parents. To abruptly leave behind one’s family and family business was a great sacrifice that went against everything the Jewish culture taught.
- Disciples usually sought out their own teachers, and because discipleship often involved temporarily laying aside one’s livelihood, including being apart from one’s wife and children, the decision to choose a teacher would have normally been made only after much deliberation.

Questions:

- + What prior experience did Jesus have with at least two of these men (see John 1:35-42)?
Since it is foolish to follow a total stranger, how well do you think these men knew Jesus?
How well would you have to know Jesus if he called you to leave your work and/or family?
- + What did Jesus mean when he said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men?”
To what extent, if any, does the call of Jesus to these four men apply to all Christians?
Do you regard yourself as a “fisherman” for Jesus? If so, how is it evident in your life?
- + How can people know for sure if Jesus has called them to follow him?
Has Jesus called you to follow Him? If so, where is he leading you?