

3.3.24 am

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Date: 03 March 2024

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] And if we can turn in our Bibles please to Matthew chapter 4. Matthew 4 and verse 17.

We thought two weeks ago about how this is the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. And the first words that Jesus speaks.

And the repeated theme that comes through the sermons that we have as Jesus preaches. It's the word, it's the theme of repentance. Repentance is something that we do when we become Christians.

And repentance is the continual state, is the continual posture as Luther put it for us in our Christian lives. We are called continually, constantly to repent and to stay close to Jesus.

So verse 17 of Matthew chapter 4.

[1 : 40] Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us.

We'll sing again to God's praise. We'll sing from Psalm 95 verses 6 and 7. O come and let us worship him.

Let us bow down with all. And on our knees before the Lord our Maker let us fall. For he's our God. The people we of his own pasture are. And of his hand the sheep today.

If ye his voice will hear. And then in the verse afterwards we have that note of warning. If we hear his voice. Then harden not your hearts. We're to respond as the disciples did to the voice of Jesus. And follow him. Not harden our hearts against him. So we'll sing these two verses of Psalm 95 in Gaelic to God's praise. NINGNINGNING!

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Satsang with Mooji would bless them Lord in their homes and we pray for for some that we see in our mind's eye who are housebound at this time we pray that in the months to come that their strength would increase and that we might see them back with us in the fellowship here and we pray for others Lord who have no thought of your house or your word or your name who have no desire to be in this place or in any other church and we ask Lord that you would awaken the souls of such that they would have a desire to come to Jesus we know that that's not something that we can do for them we know that that's not something that we can do for ourselves even but you are the God who awakens you're the God who strives with us for a season sometimes and we ask Lord that you would strive with those that we think of and pray for and even those in this building this morning who may for many years have heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me we pray that you would continue to strive with them and Lord that there would be some even one today who may trust you and begin to follow you for the first time we pray this in Jesus name Amen

One of the things that we look forward to hearing over the communion weekend is the testimonies we enjoy the preaching I know but I always can see the sense of interest that there is when somebody stands up and wants to tell the story of how they came to know Jesus when they when they started to follow Jesus and today we're looking at the story we're looking at the testimony of Simon who's who becomes known as Peter and Andrew and James and John we see them we see them beginning to follow Jesus and certainly in a in a very intimate way and what I want to do today is just step through the verses of this testimony of this story and as we do that let's be thinking ourselves have we got a testimony do we have a story can we think about how we have come to follow Jesus are we following Jesus

[10:13] I suppose is the key question various points five points if we have the time to get through them and the first point is the initiative of Jesus and if you look at verse 18 which is where the passage really begins I want to look at it says in verse 18 while walking by the sea of Galilee that's Jesus he saw two brothers and then if we fast forward to verse 21 it says and going on from there he Jesus saw two other brothers so we're thinking about a testimony we're thinking about the story of those who are beginning to follow Jesus but where does the account begin where does the testimony begin well it begins with Jesus every testimony every story of how we came to follow it begins with Jesus it doesn't begin with Simon and James and John and Andrew we don't read about them signing up for a Christianity explored class we don't read about them seeking

Jesus what we see here is that the the initiative is with Jesus Jesus is walking verse 18 he's on the move and he is by the sea of Galilee he's walking along the shoreline that's an important detail for us to note and Jesus saw two brothers verse 18 and then verse 21 Jesus saw two other brothers and the word for saw means that he stared it's not that they caught his eye and he thought just in the spur of the moment I think I'll go and have a conversation with them no he saw he stared he discerned he recognised these two sets of brothers he's looking for them and having seen them he comes to them he approaches them and that in itself is an amazing thing to think about just for a moment when we consider who Jesus is this is God the Son this is the eternal God the second person of the Trinity who condescends to this world the world that he brought into being from nothing with a word and we see him and he's walking along the shore as we often walk along the the coastline and he sees these two sets of brothers the maker of heaven and earth sees these four individuals they're not seeing

Jesus and they're not seeking Jesus but he sees them and he seeks them so that's how it all began in this this account that's how it was back on that day and that's how it still remains on this day it's very humbling Romans 3 tells us no one seeks God our hearts are so dark and and twisted through sin that we don't seek God but God seeks us now you and I can't decide one day I think I'm going to become a Christian I think I'm going to seek God I think I'm going to become a Christian we can't even think well I'm not going to become a Christian today but in 30 years time if I'm sparing well that's when I hit 60 or when I hit 70 that's when I'm going to begin to seek God that's when I'm going to become a Christian we don't have that privilege

God is the one who seeks us and just as he saw these disciples today perhaps he is seeing you and just as he was seeking these disciples perhaps today he is seeking you God the Son through the word and the power of the Holy Spirit seeking you one individual a sinner who needs to be saved even if he seeks you and I once for a moment what a privilege that is what an opportunity we have so today if you hear his voice if you sense his presence if he catches your eye don't harden your heart don't push him away as if you have the right to say come back when it's convenient if God is taking the initiative today of seeking you trust him follow him you may never get it again that's the truth we may live for 40 more years and never again sense the presence of God hear the voice of

God even have the opportunity to have our sins forgiven I've seen it so many times people who have come that close to trusting Jesus they've had the opportunity there's been a wrestle going on and they've said not today then in three weeks time you see them and you say is it going to be today and they don't know what you're talking about they have no thought of God they have no interest in God they have no sense of their sin they have no sense of need and I can see that the opportunity has passed and I pray that it comes back but today if Jesus is taking the initiative with you as he was with these brothers trust him don't harden your heart the initiative is with Jesus we see that first of all the second thing we see is the identity of the disciples again we have the few details on them in verses 18 and 21 he saw two brothers

[17:31] Simon who's called Peter and Andrew's brother casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen verse 21 he saw two other brothers James the son of Zebedee and John his brother in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets so we're not given much but we're given a wee bit here about the identity of these disciples and there's four things we can see in terms of their identity two things that perhaps will encourage us and two things that should probably challenge us so first of all we see that these disciples these men that Jesus is seeking they were from the country Jesus is looking for leaders he's looking for disciples he's looking for those who will follow him and work with him and for him and he doesn't go to the cities when we're looking for people to head up a company or to lead a battalion or to have some key position in an organisation we tend to go to the

cities we tend to go to the universities that's where the action is that's where we'll find the standout candidates we see but not

Jesus it's not how he works when Jesus is looking for disciples he doesn't go to an important city like Jerusalem which was not too far away he takes a walk along the shoreline of the sea of Galilee Ligon Duncan says Jesus met them in Galilee not in Jerusalem not in the court of Herod not in the schools of the rabbis and chief priests and Pharisees and scribes he found them in Galilee in obscurity Christ sees not as man sees so they were from the country Capernaum probably which is where they stayed had about 1500 people in it smaller than Harris and yeah that's where Jesus looks for these men to follow him the second thing that we see here is that they were just ordinary men ordinary people and these are the people that

Jesus calls to be his disciples back in that day to become a disciple of a rabbi the bar in terms of being accepted for that position was extremely high it was for the best of the best one commentator John Mark Comer he gives an insight into the type of candidates that were looked for when disciples were being selected and these were the qualifications I'll just read them out to you these were the levels of education that you had to go through by age 12 or 13 most children would have the entire Torah Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers and Deuteronomy memorized at that point most of the students went home that was level one so you had to get through level one and have the whole of the Torah memorized and that gave you potential access to level two if you could prove yourself the best and the brightest he says would go on to a second level of education by the age of 17 they would have memorized the entire

Old Testament that was level two now at this point he says the overwhelming majority were done but the best of the best of the best would apply to apprentice under a rabbi that was just the application level not the acceptance level that was the application level and then this commentator says Simon and Andrew were fishermen this means that they didn't make it into an apprenticeship program they weren't the best of the best of the best they were the ones who got sent home to make babies and pray that their sons might become rabbis but Jesus invited them to become his apprentices his disciples!

So there's encouragement there from us people in the country and we might be saying you know Jesus would never call me to follow him you know I'm just so ordinary I've got nothing much to offer I've got no great skill set there are so many people who could do much better at a job of this than I could and yet Jesus calls the ordinary he calls people like us to trust him to profess that our faith is in him to sit at his table and to serve him ordinary men from the country that was the identity of these disciples the next thing we can see about their identity is that they were family men Simon and Andrew were brothers

[22 : 52] James and John also were brothers they were the sons of Zebedee and so clearly they had responsibilities in the family and they had particular responsibilities for the family business so life was complicated and following Jesus for these men was going to mean sacrifice it was going to mean inconvenience it was going to mean tension within the family likely as they set off in a different direction it was going to mean disruption they were family men but Jesus still called them the next thing that we see is that they were busy men right if you and I see somebody who's working and we want to speak to them about something and we make an approach and we can see they're halfway through doing a job what we tend to say is I'm sorry to bother you

I thought it's maybe not a good time I'll tell you what I'll come back in a few hours and maybe you'll be finished what you're doing we can chat then that's how we would approach somebody when we can see that they're busy but Jesus doesn't approach these four brothers that way Simon and Andrew verse 18 they're midcast they're casting their nets for the next fishing expedition so they're busy but Jesus doesn't wait for any of them to finish their work mid-task he interrupts them and he says follow me and when we see that I think that challenges us because for some of us here family life is demanding and family life is tiring and family life is complicated and we're getting pulled this way and we're getting pulled that way and work is demanding and we're super busy we've got all these things to do and yet

Jesus comes to us today through the word and the power of the Holy Spirit and he does not say to you and I I'm sorry to bother you he doesn't say why I come back later when your lives are a bit calmer and you've got through the crisis of whatever it is that's overwhelming us at present Jesus says to us I am your Lord and I am your king and I'm looking at you and I know your identity and I know your situation and I know your family life and I know how busy you are and I know what your

boss is saying and I know how cluttered your diary is and I'm still calling you follow me follow me the identity of the disciples the initiative of Jesus the third thing is the thing that they're called to and what they're called to is intimacy with

Jesus look at verse 19 Jesus said to them follow me and just the simplicity of it is staggering Jesus just says follow me and from a reading if all we had was Matthew we might think well this is very abrupt Matthew is actually just summarizing the likelihood is that Jesus had dealings with these men in advance of this one commentator says in this passage we see the call of the first four disciples Jesus had known them for about a year we know that from a reading of John chapter one but in this passage Jesus issues them a special call so what kind of a special call was this well it was a call to follow him and not at a distance but intimately it was a call as

Mark puts it in Mark 3:14 it was a call to be with Jesus and that's what it means to be a Christian to be a Christian is not to have our names on a sheet for a congregation in a denomination we're not going to get asked for our papers at the gates of heaven these things are man made structures and forms to be a Christian is somebody who has trusted Jesus a Christian is somebody who is with Jesus a Christian is somebody who is following Jesus who's come to the cross who's asked for forgiveness for their sin who's embraced Jesus as Savior and who's committed to follow him each step of the way as

[28 : 26] Lord and King so are you a Christian not are you a member not have you got an affiliation with a denomination not even have you had an experience in the past but are we Christians are we with Jesus day by day by day are we with Jesus and are we willing to profess that and come and sit at the Lord's table back at the time of writing the table meant something different to what it means for us in terms of the actual table the place that you went to eat we sat around the table for five minutes we wolfed down whatever it is we've got to eat and we're gone back in that day people sat around the table for hours the table was the place that you shared life together you laughed and you cried and you there was intimacy at the table there was friendship there was fellowship at the dinner table and if we are with

Jesus if we are friends of Jesus if we are intimate with Jesus we're to come to the table and we do all the things that people did at the table we cry at the table it's rare that as I look up I don't see tears at the table because we see our sin we remember what our sin did to Jesus and we cry at the table we give thanks at the table as we remember all that Jesus did to pay for our sin we rejoice at the table we laugh at the table because we remember the resurrection we take the bread we take the wine we do this until he comes there's joy in that remembrance there's an intimacy that we experience at the table as we are with

Jesus and as we are with each other in Christ so the calling that Jesus placed upon the disciples back then the calling that is coming to us today is a call not to be distant but to be intimate with Jesus and maybe that's a call that some of us need to hear again today maybe there was once a time that we had intimacy and today we're far away for whatever reason and the call that comes to us is a call to return we don't climb our way back we don't earn our way back we just confess our sin we tell the Lord about the distance we ask for his grace and we experience what the prodigal did when he returned the embrace of the father the grace of

Jesus intimacy with Jesus the fourth point here is the intention of Jesus because Jesus says to these men as he calls them follow me and I will make you fishers of men now as we look into the lives of these men they they had repented Jesus first sermon his first words were repent change direction and these men they had turned away from their their old lives they were in the process of turning away in a spectacular way from their old lives they were repenting and sometimes I think when we think about repentance when we think about being converted we think that that's the end point sometimes we hear testimonies and when people share testimonies they'll tell us

I was this and I was that and I was the next thing and life was dark and I did all these things and then I was converted I repented I was saved the end it's not the end that's the beginning when we repent we're over the line in the sense that we're over the start line not over the finish line and Jesus he calls these men to follow him but once they start to follow that's them over the start line and Jesus has plans for these men they're going to work for him and that's something that every believer is called to Ephesians 2 verses 8 and 9 says that we're saved by grace we love to cherish these verses and stick them in our fridges and put them in frames in the walls in our houses we're saved by grace praise the Lord Ephesians 2:8 and 9 but what does it say in Ephesians 2:10 it says we're saved for works that God has prepared in advance for us to do and

[34 : 18] Peter and James and John and Andrew already they had met Jesus already it looks like they were trusting Jesus but now Jesus says I have a special mission for you I'm calling you to leave everything and follow me and it might be that that call is coming even to somebody here today sometimes Jesus calls us to stay where we are and be salt and light in the place that he would have us remain sometimes Jesus calls us to leave our boats and leave the family home and go into full time ministry it strikes me today that Scotland is darker than ever has been and yet very few in Scotland are going into ministry churches are being planted we've got ministers to put in them is that because Jesus isn't calling or because disciples aren't going

I don't know but for Peter and James and John and Andrew their calling was to be fishers of men and I like to just think about these men standing on the shore having just had this encounter and Jesus says fishers are men that's who you are now not fishers of fish fishers of men and women and boys and girls and you can imagine the disciples looking at each other bewildered and saying how do we do that what does that even mean it must have been such an overwhelming because for you and I if we're Christians as we look out even across Tarbert there are much more people outside than there are inside there are many more people who are lost than who are saved and are calling us to reach them and we ask the question how on earth do we do that and the answer to that question is actually very simple we're to follow

Jesus Price the commentator not sure it was Stevie but Price the commentator says Jesus did not challenge them to become fishers or men by a series of techniques they could learn or methods they could follow but took upon himself the responsibility to make you fishers or men this was to be his business Jesus says I will make you fishers or men that's my business your business disciples is just to follow me trust me stay close to me and when I was thinking about this my mind went again to probably the best example of fishing that I have seen in my time in Harris and it happened in a hospital ward with

Ina no minister's collar very little strength no mobility but because she was so close to Jesus because she was following him to the end of her days Jesus made her in the hospital ward the most amazing fisher of men and it all comes down to following Jesus closely the intention of Jesus to make us fishers of men is linked to the calling that Jesus places upon us to be intimate with him so the question that comes to you and to me again is are we still following Jesus closely Christian are you still following Jesus closely or have you drifted because it's in following

Jesus closely that we can be effective in our fishing if we are to be fishers of people we must be continually following Jesus if we are to be fishers of people if we are to be fruitful in this work we must be continually as it says in John 15 abiding remaining in Christ the intention of Jesus is to make them fishers of men and finally very briefly the immediate response to Jesus verse 20 and verse 22 immediately it says they left their nets and followed him so Simon and Andrew hear the call immediately nets down they follow Jesus verse 22 James and John immediately they left their boat and their father got this picture of the father in this boat going what are you doing

[39 : 50] Zebedee by the way was a man who was rich he would have had people to help him he wasn't being left high and dry God had provided people to assist him in the work that he was doing but for James and!

John his! Jesus said follow! me and immediately they followed him think about that as we close put yourself in the shoes of these disciples they were to leave everything and follow Jesus and Jesus didn't say let me give you the sales pitch for how amazing this is going to be he just says follow me and Jesus doesn't say let me talk you through the next three years and the plan so you're fully aware of everything you're getting into no he just says follow me and it was a massively big decision and it was a life changing decision and it was a costly decision and it was going to mean huge sacrifice and it took them all of no!

time at all to respond they just follow and their whole lives changed direction in that moment as they turned away from a life without Jesus and they turned in faith to Jesus and it's a picture of repentance you want to know what repentance looks like look at these four guys this is a picture that is given to us at the very beginning of ministry that shows us what it looks like to trust Jesus as Lord and King Spurgeon says they come straightway they come at all cost they come without a question they come to quit old haunts they come to follow their leader without stipulation or reserve there's an immediate response to Jesus from them and the question that you and

I have to wrestle with as we finish is what about us will we follow Jesus will we return to Jesus if we have got off track are we following Jesus in this way this is what we're called to and it is costly and

sometimes it's terrifying and it's entirely unpredictable!

But a life following Jesus is what we're made for and there's no more exciting thrilling purposeful joyful satisfying life than to follow Jesus for every day I have on earth is given by the king so I will give my life my all love!

[43 : 19] to love and follow him sing to conclude the words of that hymn a hymn that takes us to the cross to begin with as we see all that Jesus has done for us to give us life and then as we respond at the end with a commitment to follow the Lord let's stand to sing just a moment to God's praise song my heart is filled with and for rest to him who all I play who loved the depths of my distress and gave me life again who crushed my curse of sinfulness and brought me with his eyes and wrote his law of righteousness with power upon my heart my heart is filled with glad fullness to him who walks beside!

who runs my weakness with strength and lost his fears to die whose every promise is enough for every step I did!

love love and crowning me with grace! My heart is filled with God fullness to him who reigns above whose wisdom is my perfect best whose set me to time for every day I have honor is given by the King so I will give my life my all to love and follow!

him now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen