

Matthew 4:12-23

So here we are on the Northern side of the Sea of Galilee (actually Lake Gennesaret which means harp its shape... 13 miles long by 8 miles wide). Again, we have a whose kingdom is it issue... and who has power over your life?

Here at the small fishing villages on the Northern side of the Lake is where Jesus spends most of His time and it is where most of the disciples come from – Corzine, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.

They are all right next to each other and if you're looking in the opposite direction to your right would be the city of Tiberius...named after the second Roman emperor who was in power during Jesus' adult life...

Remember the first emperor which made Rome Great again was Augustus). And the city of Tiberius was the seat of power for Herod's son Antipas and on the left would be a City on a Hill (Bet She'in) one of the ten cities of the Decapolis the power and might of Hellenistic Culture.

And these tiny villages literally sat in the shadow of these two great kingdoms.

That's the setting...So now what else is strange in this story?

Why would anyone just drop everything and follow this guy?

And doesn't it also seem strange that Papa Zebedee says nothing that his boys just up and leave their families trade and livelihood?!

So what's going on here?

Now Rabbi's came onto the scene during the intertestamental time...that 500 years between the Old and New Testaments... Rabbi means teacher of the law. In the ancient world the Rabbi was "the man"!

The rabbi would interpret the Torah and God's laws for God's people. And remember the word Israel means to "wrestle with" so Rabbinic teachings were an ongoing conversation and debate among the people.

The place for these conversations was the town synagogue and anyone had a say in scripture interpretation...and on occasion a Rabbi would come into the town.

And back then, like now, there were many diverse schools of thought...right left and everywhere in between...just like today!

For example how would you interpret the commandment thou shall not kill? They would debate and wrestle with these types of things. Can you never kill...what about a mosquito, ... then how would we live we kill our food, could you kill an enemy, what about in self-defense etc...

But unlike today they recognized there was not any one true way to interpret the word of God. It is through conversation and dialog and wrestling with (God-Talk) that we enter into a relationship with one another as we point to the Divine...

Interestingly enough...Have you ever thought about your faith as being an interpretation? And is it OK to have different interpretations of the Scriptures?

Well back then ,the Rabbis held a special wisdom when it came to the laws...they were seen as the best of the best in interpreting scriptures... just like different priests will teach you and interpret Jesus' teachings in many different ways.

Now a disciple followed a rabbi...and this is important... not just to know what the rabbi knows, but also, in time, to DO what their rabbi does.

So what would make these fishermen drop everything and follow Jesus? Now back then Jesus already had a blossoming reputation... and word

gets around quick...charisma...signs and miracles...free lunches and free healthcare!

These fishermen probably heard that Jesus was coming...teaching and healing. Jesus was a rabbi and like I said a rabbi was a very special person. When a teacher came to town, everyone would take notice... Jesus came out to these men in their livelihood - where they lived and worked.

Back then all Jewish children went to school and learned the Torah as their basic teachings... after their elementary learning they would leave their education and apprentice in their family's trade.

The disciples from these small fishing villages were plying their family trade - fishermen.

Now during that time the few especially bright and gifted children would go on further in school to study Midrash or interpretation of the law. And still others, a very small number, the best and brightest would be chosen by a rabbi to follow him and his school of thought.

They would leave their homes and follow their teacher in what's called walking in the dust of your rabbi...Which is to say they would follow behind the rabbi to become like their teacher in time.

The rabbi-disciple model was well established in Jesus' day. To follow a rabbi literally meant to "go behind". The disciples not only followed and learned but in time were to become a living embodiment of the teacher so that they too can live and act as their rabbi before them acted and then pass that knowledge to others.

The disciples here were chosen to follow Jesus...and remember only the best and brightest were chosen. Yet here Jesus chooses among the everyday "any bodies" to follow him...people just like you and me...to embody and become like Jesus Himself!

The term Fisher of men had Messianic overtones as well. The term harkens back to the prophet Jeremiah as he spoke of the day all God's people would be gathered back together as one...Tikkun Olam!

The disciples were given the honor to follow this "up and coming" rabbi, and they would not hesitate to follow...this was a chance of a lifetime for them. It would be like someone coming by and offering free college to your kids... you wouldn't stand in their way to better themselves or their lifestyle.

That's why Pappa Zebedee doesn't even flinch...he would have probably been ecstatic for his sons... although depending on how big his family was... that could put a strain on the families fishing business!

It's also very probable that Jesus groomed His disciples over time here in this region. Jesus left Nazareth and lived in Capernaum. Many times, we get the impression that they just left everything behind never to return...that was probably not the case...

HOWEVER, the one thing that DID change is that their life now centered on Jesus and His teachings...God at the center.

The Disciples education was probably more organic as they experienced the kingdom of God as it intersected their normal lives day to day.

SO how did a teaching and way of life experienced by 12 any bodies become what we see today.

Well it was a message of hope given to people who needed to transcend their fears about life and their meager circumstances. It was a message of the extraordinary experienced in ordinary lives. I wonder could we use that kind of teaching today.

Now the New Testament as it is written was not written until well after Jesus' death. But the good news was shared in communities and in conversation as ordinary people invited other ordinary people into this experience of God in their midst...many of those needing to hear the

gospel were especially those people who were oppressed and struggling or out on the margins of society...same as today.

See the people in power generally don't see any upside in sharing their power with the any bodies and the no bodies.

But Jesus sees it all quite differently. It is in inviting others and in sharing God's and our stories that we come to experience a different kind of existence in this life...

Something more meaningful...more deeper...something connected and whole...experiencing the extraordinary in our ordinary lives day to day!

On several occasions I have had extraordinary things happen in my life. But it was in the sharing my story of God working in and through my life that got others to also tell their own stories of God working in their own lives as well.

It actually seems many people have experienced this extraordinary power of God in their lives...the problem is that they fail to share it with anybody. They are afraid they would be looked at as crazy or not quite right.

One interesting fact is on the rise. In Diane Butler Bass' book Grounded she talks about the decline of religious life in America, but she also reports about a significant rise in people having mystical experiences.

Half of all people in the US report having some mystical transcendent experience in their lives. Why are we not inviting others into this conversation? What's going on?

Do we really think the Holy Spirit of the Divine Source of All Being just stopped inspiring people 2000 years ago with the stories we have in the Bible...how many other stories are there in people's lives?

If we truly believe in a divine being or in a divine intelligence, then it would make sense that God is still communicating with us all right now...just pick up the phone and listen!

For me I can say that I see God's hand all over the place... I have had many such stories of God incidences in my life...I have no need to believe in God... because I have personally experienced God so many times myself!

SO shouldn't we be inviting others into our story... into our church, into our homes... and into our hearts to share and witness God showing up all over the place?!

So now we know why Jesus picked the disciple's he did...They represent lots of different viewpoints...they represent you and me...normal, ordinary, day-to-day people...living ordinary lives...just like you and me.

And we are all invited by Jesus today to continue to follow Him...not that we need to drop everything we do for a living or leave our family or our community... but that we are now invited to place Jesus and His teachings at the center of our lives.

And when we do this we will become fishers of people my friends... inviting people back into right relationship with all of creation...so that we all in turn become like our Rabbi ourselves.

It's a movement of "the any bodies" and the not "good enoughs"... Jesus calls everyday people to be disciples... and those 12 or so folks changed the course of human history! I wonder what impact we can have today... by just inviting God into the center of our lives and then to invite others to follow.

When Peter is walking on water then starts sinking... he doesn't doubt Jesus, he doubts himself...that he could ever be like his rabbi.

Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven...an ordinary person with so many flaws...a person just like you and me!

Now belief in Jesus is important, but what about Jesus' belief in you?

He must have faith in us because he leaves it all in the hands of His followers. You see God believes in you? Believe in yourself...God certainly dies!

Jesus has faith that you can follow Him and that you can be just like Him. So can you be a person of love and compassion and truth; a person of forgiveness, peace, joy and hope?

May you come to not only believe in God... but come to know that God believes in you! Jesus trusts that you can be like Him...covered in the dust of your Rabbi!

...and we ordinary disciples, we any bodies... will come to usher in the Kingdom of God here on the Earth...so let's start here...and let's start now!

Your faithful servant,

carmen