

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸ As he walked 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 fishers. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Have you ever gotten a phone call that made you drop what you were doing and run out of the house? Maybe your wife was in labor. Maybe a loved one was in the Emergency Room or the nurse’s office at school. Maybe someone was in a car accident. Whatever the case might have been, you immediately made responding to that news the highest priority. Everything else had to be put on the backburner, so to speak.

I lived with the experience of responding to emergency phone calls for ten years as a hospice chaplain. I would start the day with a solid plan. I'd go visit these five people in this geographically practical area. But then the phone would ring and it might be a nurse or social worker who would call me to come quickly. I'd drop my plans, respond, and then shuffle things around and make a new plan for the next day.

At night, about once or twice a week, I'd be on-call, and when work called, nothing else mattered. On-call visits were urgent. You couldn't say to a family at 3 a.m., "Would it be all right with you if I came at 8, or even 7?" If you got a call, you responded. You changed out of pajamas, threw shoes on, and ran out the door. No matter what, you dropped everything and responded to the call.

And I've known people who have upended their whole lives when they have felt a call from God. One of my seminary friends, Julie, married a man who grew up in Brooklyn and was working in New York City at the stock exchange on 9/11. After that day, he quit his job and went to seminary, married Julie, and he is now the head of chaplaincy for a large hospital system in Houston.

Some of you might be related to men or women who woke up on December 8, 1941, heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, and immediately enlisted in the armed forces. They dropped everything and answered a call.

We admire people who respond to calls. We give them credit for their faithfulness and devotion, their sense of duty and higher purpose. One local first responder is our own Jake Longolucco. Jake is a lieutenant at the Narragansett Fire Department, Station 2. Jake works 24-hour shifts and his station typically gets about 15 calls per shift. As the lieutenant, he goes on more than half and is responsible for the whole crew and all the calls regardless of his presence. And his station, closest to Point Judith, also makes runs for water rescues and fires offshore. When he gets home, he relieves Sarah from parenting duties for their one- and four-year-olds so Sarah can focus on her job of improving the quality of life and productivity for sailors in the Navy. Jake doesn't ignore calls from his girls or from the dispatcher. When he's asked to respond, he does, and we respect him and all

our first responders who serve our community who head toward someone's crisis multiple times a day.

And then we read this story about Andrew and Peter, James and John dropping their nets, leaving their boats, walking away from Mr. Zebedee's fishing business; and we think, "Wow. What faith. What courage. What commitment." I mean, later on, we find out that Peter was married, and we think, "You did what? You walked away from your wife!?! I hope you went back and got your wife's blessing before you quit your job and started following the homeless man who said he's God's son!" But we still give them a lot of credit for their response to Jesus.

Now, I wouldn't want my kids to follow a strange, 30-ish year-old man, but I would let my kids follow Andy, or Mary, or Michael, or anybody here at church who was leading the children. If they said, "Come, follow me." I'd want them to get up and follow quickly.

I'm ok with them following someone I know, but I do not want them to blindly follow a stranger. There's a difference.

And I think it's an important difference, because if we just read Matthew, it looks like four fishermen dropped everything to follow a total stranger. That something in their soul pulled them toward Jesus, like they had invisible strings on their arms and legs – marionette puppets under the control of a God who made them drop their nets and leave their homes.

But, thanks be to God, we have four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, and the account in the Gospel of John has got some important details we can use.

So, hear these words from John, "The next day [the day after Jesus was baptized] John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two

who heard John speak and followed [Jesus] was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter)."

This is also the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Now, this is why Andrew is probably my favorite disciple. He doesn't get much attention. He doesn't get many lines in the scripture. But Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. Andrew was already primed to be on the lookout for the Lamb of God. He was following John like a devoted student follows a teacher. And then, one day, the day after Jesus is baptized, John sees Jesus walking by and says, "That's him. That's the Messiah." And Andrew and his fellow disciple drop what they're doing, leave John, and follow Jesus. They ask Jesus if they can hang out with him that evening. Then Andrew goes home and finds his brother and tells him what's happened and brings his brother to Jesus.

Andrew is the first to follow – even before the invitation to follow is really presented, and he recruits heavy hitters – the big three – the inner circle. And nowhere does it say he is jealous that the people he recruits get more attention than he does.

Andrew got to hang out with Jesus for a whole evening before any of the other disciples knew what was coming! Andrew is the OG – the original of the twelve! And it was his faith, his excitement, his witness that got his brother Simon's attention. And James and John, who they ran into on the shoreline twice a day as they came to and left their boats, they heard Andrew talking excitedly about the Messiah, too, I'm confident.

And that leads me to believe that if Andrew got to spend the day with Jesus, and if Andrew brought his brother to meet Jesus, all before that moment on the shoreline when they dropped everything, then they weren't following a stranger as the Matthew text might lead us to believe. They were following the one they knew enough about to trust and believe in.

And James and John? I don't know if one of them were with Andrew all along – the “second disciple of John the Baptist” whose name we never are told, but in the small town of Capernaum, where everyone knew everyone, especially people who worked the same shoreline, I'm confident they knew each other.

It all starts somewhere. Someone has to be willing to take that first step. Then the momentum builds, and it's easier to join in if your friends are there, too.

And that gives me hope, because we don't need to always be the hero. We can serve by dropping everything and then getting people involved. We can tell our friends and family about things we're interested in and excited about. And it can inspire them. If you feel like you don't have the capacity to be a Peter or a James or a John, could you be an Andrew?

I think you could. Frederick Buechner once said, “The first ministers [of the Jesus movement] were the twelve disciples. There is no evidence that Jesus chose them because they are brighter or nicer than other people. Their sole qualification seems to have been their initial willingness to rise to their feet when Jesus said, ‘Follow me.’”

For a long time, I thought that the fishermen dropped everything to follow a total stranger. That something predestined in their soul that was ignited when they laid eyes on Jesus, but now I see them as normal human beings with free will. Human beings who were ready for the Messiah to come and change things. They did drop everything, but it wasn't blind obedience, it was a response to a glimpse of hope. It was a few hours of inspiration for Andrew. Enough to make him believe. And then his witness brought others.

And friends, we're all in an even better place to respond to Jesus' call than the fishermen. We have read four different accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. We have two thousand years of witnesses who say Jesus is their savior. We don't have a glimpse, we have a bigger picture. Is there anything more you need to see or hear before you're willing to answer a call from Jesus to follow?

Because, friends, Jesus needs you to respond. Jesus calls us constantly to drop what we're doing and show up for those who feel lonely. To call those who are hurting. To

feed those who are hungry. To clothe those who are cold. To house those who are unhoused. To fight for justice and human decency. To fight for even those who are strangers because Jesus says when you care for the least among us, the least welcome, the least loved, the least respected, you care for Jesus. I don't know how much clearer he could be.

Yes, we have responsibilities. Daily, weekly, monthly responsibilities. Families that depend on us to be consistent and reliable. Safety risks to consider, but there are moments when we need to drop what we're doing and answer the call. The opportunities are all around us. Will you follow, or make excuses, or think that you don't have enough money, time, or energy to make a difference? I beg to disagree. Jesus called four redneck fishermen - uneducated, poor Galileans. If God can use them, God can use you. Amen.