***January 22, 2023      Called Together***

The Gospel lesson for this Sunday St. Matthew 4:12-23, is so radical! It is radical to believe that people would leave their place of business to follow a teacher who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." After Jesus had finished preaching a sermon in Capernaum, he took a stroll along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. In verses 18-19 we read “As Jesus walked by the seaside, he noticed two brothers - Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother - casting a net into the sea. He called out to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Peter and Andrew did not sit in the boat and reflect on what Jesus said to them. Apparently, they did not count the cost. Nor did they call a committee meeting. Nor did they form an association to provide them with support. Instead, they immediately left their nets and followed him.

This gospel passage is a marvelous mystery, on the one hand God works despite us, and on the other hand we are central to the plan God has of bringing salvation and wholeness to our world. Jesus made it clear that there are some specific things for men and women to do, ministries which God uses to do the kingdom-building work: like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, aiding the poor, visiting those in prison, witnessing to everyone about God's love revealed in Jesus. But for many in our society darkness prevails, as in Isaiah's day. Other gods than the Lord are being worshipped. Other ways of life than the way for which we are created are being followed.

As Jesus continued his walk along the seaside (verse 21), he saw two other brothers - James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in the boat and Zebedee, their father. They were rocking back and forth in the boat, minding their own business, and mending their nets when Jesus called out to them to follow. As with Peter and Andrew, they left their trade and their father and followed Jesus of Nazareth. According to Matthew, they did not hesitate. They followed immediately. Who among us would respond in this way? I mean, how many people in this congregation today would put a padlock on their business and chase a person like Jesus?

What if everybody followed the example of those fishermen? What if everybody heard the call and heeded to it? Who would mind the store? Who would pay the taxes? Who would run the church? Who would paint, make music, or govern? Our tendency is to brush off this story as being unrealistic. It is okay for them to be radical in their response. But it is not okay for us.

On the other hand, one cannot read the New Testament without seeing that some followed in a radical way. Jesus said, Follow me, to a tax collector named Matthew; and Matthew got up and followed him. Philip, who was from Andrew and Peter's hometown, followed his calling. John reports in his gospel John 1:43 that Jesus said, "Follow me," and Nathaniel, also known as Bartholomew, followed. According to the church tradition, Bartholomew followed the call by carrying the Gospel to various countries. And in Act 9:11, Paul, who heard Jesus say, "Rise and enter the city and you will be told what to do," went forth and proclaimed: "Jesus is the Son of God."

In John Bunyan's book Pilgrim’s Progress, the hero "Christian" went on a journey. Through temptations and unhappy experiences, Christian stands steadfast in his faith until crossing through the waters of Jordan into the Celestial City. The people of Israel were on a similar journey from Egypt to their promised land. Their faith was sometimes tried and found wanting; but their leader, Moses, was steadfast and so was his appointed successor, Joshua. Likewise, Christian’s view life as following - following in the steps of Jesus.

Where does the following of Jesus leave us? If others have heard the call and have responded in a radical way, then shouldn't we all do the same? I cannot answer that question for you. It must be answered by each of us as we experience God's call in our lives. How one hears the call and responds to it is a matter of personal decision.

However, there is an inescapable truth in the story of Jesus' call to the fishermen and their response. The truth is that who we worship can and will make a claim on all our lives. It is impossible to worship the God of Jesus Christ and not have that God expect more of us than we are often ready to give. Whether or not we respond to the call, the call of Christ is always unsettling. Hearing it is always disturbing. It disrupts our lives and pulls us in new directions. If you would like to know more about the Call of God, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.