

**“The Dynamics of Discipleship:
Deciding To Do It”
Mark 1:16-20**

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One of my all-time favorite stories is about Sam the Fisherman. Sam liked to fish and he was really good at it. Every time he went out, he always came back with a catch. He was so good at fishing; in fact, the guys down at the coffee shop got a little jealous of him and began to question his methods of fishing. The game warden overheard the gossip and so he asked Sam about his fishing techniques. Sam said, “If you want to know how I fish, why don’t you come go fishing with me?” So on a fine spring morning, the two of them went down to the lake, started up the boat, pushed out from the shore and motored to Sam’s favorite fishing spot. Sam killed the engine, reached under his boat seat and pulled out a stick of dynamite. He then lit the thing and threw it out into the lake. When the fish started coming to the surface from the explosion, Sam just began to reach down with his fish net and drop them into the boat, one at a time. Well, the game warden went berserk. He began to scream at the top of his lungs, “Man, you can’t fish this way. In fact, when I get you back to shore, I’m going to arrest you and put you in jail.” Sam didn’t say a word. He just reached under his boat seat and got another stick of dynamite. He lit it and handed it over to the game warden and said, “Sir, are you going to talk or are you going to fish?”

Salvation is God’s free gift. We neither deserve it nor earn it. The best we can do with our lives is to reach out and receive it. Discipleship, on the other hand, is a dynamite decision. It demands my life, my soul, my all. It is to dynamic discipleship that I invite you to today during this Lenten season.

Today's sermon is contained in six words and the first three are these – **Jesus calls us.** Let the gospels speak for themselves. Verse 16 says, "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men." Verse 19 says, "When He had gone a little further, he saw James and John in a boat, preparing their nets, and without delay, He called them." Matthew 9:9 says, "As Jesus went from there, He saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the tax collectors booth. Follow Me, He told him and Matthew got up and followed him." If you've been reading this devotional guide, you know that this story repeats itself again and again. You've visited the calling of Phillip and Nathaniel as well as others. The list goes on. It included Nicodemus who couldn't see and Zaccheus who was up a tree. It extends to Mary who couldn't quit crying, and a rich, young ruler who couldn't quit whining. Most of all it includes you and me. Jesus calls us.

The invitation is intensely personal and explicitly relational. Jesus calls us. Let me be perfectly clear today – it's not Howard calling, it's not the church calling, it's not civility calling, it's not the denomination calling, it's Jesus calling to you.

Some years ago, a wonderful, young couple started attending the church I was pastoring. They got there the way most people get to churches. They came because friends of theirs invited them to come. They were a delightful couple. One day they came to see me about joining the church. They said they loved the music, they liked the people, they were impressed with the ministry to children, and they were especially concerned about that because they were expecting their first child. They even had complimentary things to say about the sermon. Finally, the wife said, "We've just got one problem with your church. You talk too much about Jesus

around here. In fact, we've been listening over the last several months and every time people come down to the front of the church wanting to make professions of faith, you ask questions like, "Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and pledge your allegiance to God's Kingdom." We think that's rather sectarian. We'd love to be a part of your church but could we join without accepting Jesus?" Without judgment but without hesitation, I said to them "No." You see, to have the culture of the church without the Christ of the Church, is an oxymoron. Christ Himself is Christianity and don't let us ever forget it.

Some of you have known Jesus since you sat on your mother's knee and she read you the Bible. You've walked with Him and you've talked with Him through the years. He's reminded you again and again that you belong to Him. Even today, when you got to church, you hardly slipped into your pew until you heard His voice and you knew again down deep in your heart, the blessed assurance of making this journey with none other than Jesus, the Christ Himself.

For others, it's not been so natural. You've called Jesus' name more often as a curse word than a prayer. You never quite caught on to the creeds and the classes; if in fact, you were ever exposed to one in the first place. The thought of an invisible Jesus calling your name towards discipleship is strange to you, to say the least. Nevertheless, my friend, you are here and you're in this very room for a purpose. God has called you here and I say to you, listen, listen because He's calling. He's calling for you.

*I had walked life's way with an easy tread,
Had traveled where comforts and pleasures led,
Until one day, in a quiet place, I met the Master face to face.
With station and rank and wealth for my goal,
Much thought for my body but none for my soul,
I had entered to win in life's mad race,*

*Till I met the Master face to face.
I met Him and knew Him and blushed to see,
That His eyes full of sorrow were fixed on me,
And I faltered and fell at his feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away.
Melted and vanished in their place,
Naught else could I see but the Master's face.*

The last three words of this sermon compose a question. **Will you follow?** That's it. Jesus calls us, of that I'm certain. I asked myself as I wrote this sermon as I ask you today, in this beautiful place with many people to worship with -- will you follow? Jesus calls us and the imperative is impressively the same. It's always, "Follow Me."

On the one hand, the command is profoundly simple. Start walking. Everybody's got to learn from somebody. Who teaches you? Who disciples you? Honestly, there is one thing that's for sure; you are somebody's disciple. You cannot get through life without learning from somebody. You've learned how to live from somebody else. What I want to say to you today is choose your role models well because you will become more like them than you can imagine. Everybody is following somebody and Jesus says, "Will you follow Me?"

One of the great joys of ministry is to have people along the way embrace not only you but your profession and calling. They are your sons and daughters in the ministry. They become your disciples even though they've never officially enrolled in a class. A few years ago, some friends of mine went to hear a young man in the church who had gone into ministry. They came back and said, "Howard, Larry preaches just like you!" My response was "God, help him! He needs to do better than that!"

We become like our teachers and Jesus says, "Follow Me." A disciple is simply someone who's decided to be with another

person in order to learn from that person. When Jesus called people, he didn't ask them to shape up and straighten up and clean up first. He just asked them to get up and start walking. To follow is to tag along or as teenagers say, "It's to hang with." It's profoundly simple. Just start trying to learn about this Master's way and by the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit, put it into practice. To follow is to tag along. It's to spend time and to learn as much about His life and ways as possible. "I'm not necessarily trying to do everything He did," said one disciple, "I'm just learning how to everything I do as He did what He did." He becomes the model. It's profoundly simple.

But I need to be fair with you – it is incredibly profound to follow. British actor, Robert Powell, portrayed Jesus in the television epic, "The Life of Christ." After that experience he wrote this, "I never was a devout person. The last time I was in church was as a little kid, yet since having been confronted with the life of Jesus for the past seven months as intensely as I've been, I suddenly have doubts about my doubts." To follow is incredibly profound and we issue you an invitation this Lenten season to walk as Jesus walked. I must be honest with you. I must put a warning label on this whole process. You can't walk as Jesus walked and think as Jesus thought and act as Jesus acted without something profoundly different happening in your soul. If you don't want God to get down in your spirit and stir around so that you are changed before it's all over, then be careful about this walk. The One who invites us and calls us will by simple association begin to change us and transform us and renew us until we're into a new way of thinking and new way of believing and a new way of acting. This is what following really means. The invitation is for you.

About a hundred years ago, a pastor out in Topeka, Kansas, preached a series of Sunday night services on the subject, "What Would Jesus Do?" Dr. Charles Shelton tried to imagine the impact of an upper middle class congregation pledging to earnestly and honestly not do anything without first seeking the

will of God in the matter. The series of sermons produced the Christian classic, "In His Steps," and generation after generation finds this old book. Don't ever forget what he said in that classic. *WWJD*, (what would Jesus do?) is more than something you wear around your wrist. For Ed Norman to ask, "What would Jesus do?" led to a change in the editorial policies of the newspaper. For Alexander Powers, asking "What would Jesus do?" meant critical, ethical decision down at the railroad station where he worked. For artist, Rachel Winslow, it meant a change in her whole vocation. Be careful. It will change your life. You see, *WWJD* is more than a bracelet for your wrist; it's an engagement of your heart. It is the invitation of Jesus.

At a certain high school, three military recruiters showed up to address the seniors. With graduation only a few months away, they were trying to get their quota of recruits for the Armed Services. They were given 45 minutes, 15 minutes each, to make their speech and address the assembly. The Army and the Navy recruiters went first. They got so carried away with their presentations, that when they were finished, the Marine recruiter had only 2 minutes to speak. When he stepped to the podium, he stood there silent for about 60 seconds. When he broke the silence, this is what he said, "There's probably not more than 2 or 3 of you in this room who could cut it as a Marine but if you happen to think you're one of the 2 or 3, then meet me in the dining hall following this assembly." You can guess about where the students showed up!

As Jesus walked beside the sea, he said to four fishermen, "Follow Me." That made all the difference not only in their lives but also in the entire world.

Are you going to talk or are you going to fish?

