



A stewardship resource published by the [Ecumenical Stewardship Center](#)

In partnership with the [Center for Faith and Giving](#)

©2020 Ecumenical Stewardship Center

©2020 Center for Faith and Giving

Ecumenical Stewardship Center

101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374

Phone: 855-278-4ESC (4372), Fax: 765-966-1293

Email: office@stewardshipresources.org

Website: <https://stewardshipresources.org>

All included Bible passages are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

Permission is granted to reproduce any portion of this resource for use in your congregation.



Considering the Text

January 26, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23, Come and Follow Me

Theme: Faithful

There is a scene in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* where the main character, Rey, has a dialogue with Maz. Maz tells Rey that the belonging she seeks is not behind her, but lies ahead. The conversation continues with commentary on the Force that surrounds and moves everything, including Rey.

This scene centers on vocation. It is Rey being called, which is the literal meaning of the word. Rey is called to more than what she is and where she is. This is the essence of vocation. It is that which beckons us beyond our current context and status. Vocation says “come,” “go further,” “move deeper,” and “follow the path to possibility.”

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus summons fishermen to rethink their professional standing. First-century fishermen were despised and lowly people. Although they were not at the top of the economic pyramid in the Greco-Roman world, they were not exactly at the bottom, like shepherds. They belonged to a middle poor in that the fishing industry was as ubiquitous as the sea itself. Fishermen could not determine how much they earned, as the Roman political and economic system regulated taxation. Any subsequent remaining profit went to the elite and to those who controlled the fishing process from the top.

Thus, the system in which fishermen operated was not one that allowed for entrepreneurship or capitalism, as in our modern-day thinking. It was a matter of fishing to eat and survive. We know about the middle poor: fast food workers wanting a fair wage, WalMart employees deserving more than just a blue smock, custodial workers and housekeepers doing what they do until they can do better.

In addition, those in the fishing industry depended on others in various professions to supply nets, boats, and other needed materials. Processors, distributors, buyers, and sellers partnered with those whose primary responsibility it was to catch fish. So this was not an individual commercial endeavor. It was one grounded in relationships, akin to present-day unions.

Worth noting is that Jesus uses language connected to the fishermen's present livelihood to help them evaluate future options. He meets the soon-to-be disciples on their own linguistic turf. He does not engage farming codes with fishermen. However, in a play on words Jesus commands them—dares them—to fish for people, not animals. In initiating a change in their lives, Jesus first acknowledges the current status of the men. Where they are now is not discounted for the sake of trying to move to the next level.

Vocation begins with identity certainty. The Creator who fearfully and wonderfully made us knows how to call us in order to remake us. The gifts and graces we currently have are engaged and ultimately reconfigured so that we may respond to the call to come go further, and follow the path of possibility. Identity certainty is not synonymous with stagnation, but it is acknowledgement of who we are and who we need to become in order to serve others. Our idiosyncrasies are fallow ground for looking at ourselves anew and answering the One who beckons us to fish, teach, lead, write, sing, act, do, and be in another way. The almost-yet-disciples are called to redirect their fishing to humankind. Use what you have been doing, so that you may get a do-over and subsequently do something new.

In this text, Jesus not only honors identity certainty through the employment of contextualized professional language, but he also does this in the specific manner in which he summons the fisherman. Verse 19 records Jesus saying to Simon Peter and Andrew, "Follow me." In verse 21 the narrator has Jesus seeing James and John and calling them. Each pair of brothers is subject to a different imperative. Yes, they all know the language of fishing. Yes, they are all subject to a command. Yet, as Simon Peter and Andrew are casting their nets and as James and John are mending nets, the directives to redirect their lives are distinct.

The four men in chapter four are of the same sea, but what is said to them is similar and yet, specific. Simon and Andrew are to follow. James and John are called. The Greek for *follow* is *deute*. It means what it sounds like—duty to follow. Καλέω (kal-eh-o) captures in the Greek the wording for *call*. It is the same Jesus who summons them, but his means for doing so is unique to their respective lives.

We may be called to preach, but the Divine does not summon us all in cookie-cutter fashion. We may be told to follow and to teach without explanation. However, there is no one-size-fits-all model. The Spirit may coerce us to leave the familiar for the unknown. Nonetheless, our stories of such compulsion can be as unique as we are. Just as Simon, Andrew, James, and John were engaged in similar yet different contexts, so does the Creator take our points of intersection and interconnectedness to show us how we must sail uncharted waters.

Faithfulness to the call from the Holy One ought to hinge on the awareness that God calls us to be true to who we are. Yes, vocation and calling require us to grow and mature. Still, the beginning is grounded in what is already there. There is an existential etiology to our being called by the Lord. As God has allowed us to be faithful and true to our identity, out of gratitude

for such we should be faithful and respond to the call to go wider, deeper, higher, and farther. Faithful stewardship is holding in tandem where and who we were when Jesus called with what are called to be here and now. For the One who calls is indeed faithful.

Stewardship as a response to grounding in identity certainty frees the respondent—the one called—to display care for all things. It is treating people and institutions with a sense of historical value and cultural and spiritual purpose. The past informs the present and provides insight for the future.

Finally, this text not only helps us see the significance of identity certainty and the uniqueness of such related callings. Additionally, one cannot discount that Jesus does not call us to face anything to which we cannot relate or handle. This text comes immediately after the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4.1-12). His identity as a hungry human being is challenged. Make these stones into bread. Jesus was hungry; we hunger. His identity as God's son is poked. If God loves you, surely the Divine will save you—jump! If God loves us, surely God will catch us when we foolishly fall—fall for the deceiver's shenanigans. So go ahead and take the fatal leap. Jesus' identity as a power-needing ruler is prodded. Worship me and get more. The world offers us the carrot of more and more authority, and more and more people to fawn over us.

Jesus knows what it means to have an identity crisis. Jesus knows what it means to know who you really are. His calling fishermen in the language of fishing in order that they might redirect such fishing is not out of a vocational vacuum. Calling is rooted in our core being. It is out of this center that the streams of faithful stewardship flow.

Yes, Rey; yes, fellow readers; that calling is like a Force—or in our language, the Spirit—that summons us to what lies ahead. It is only in recognizing who we are that we can move forward and remain faithful.



Worship Resources

January 26, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23, Come and Follow Me

Theme: Faithful

The invitation to follow Jesus is “come and follow me”. What does it mean to follow Jesus? How does that impact the things we are stewards of in our lives?

Call to Worship

One: Come! Now is the time to gather for worship. Christ calls us into community and into communion with him.

Many: Let us enter in with open ears and open hearts, ready to receive the call of Christ in a new way today!

Invocation

Holy One, you call out to us again and again throughout our lives. Sometimes the call comes bold and insistent: sometimes it is a nudge or a whisper. However you are calling us today, O God, help us to hear you, and to feel your nearness.

Offering Meditation

A friend told me a story of the most meaningful gift he ever received from his elementary-school-aged daughter: Three bright blue post-it notes, each one with careful childish penmanship spelling out the phrase, “Just say NO”. When the father asked his daughter what they were for, she quickly replied, “One for your phone, one for your computer, one for your desk at work.” She went on to explain that her father said “Yes” too often to too many things, and it meant he wasn’t available to spend time with her.

It is a common refrain in church offering meditations to be invited to think about what it is that we can give—how to say “YES” so we can offer ourselves more fully to the world’s need. Today, I’m asking you to think differently.

Think about what “No” is needed in your life so that you can spend more time with Jesus, discerning what Jesus truly wants from and with you. Let this earnest consideration be part of your offering today.

****Additional engagement option:** Put a post-it note on each bulletin and suggest to the congregation to jot down something they will say “no” to, and include it with their offering in the offering basket or plate as it passes. Another option is to invite the congregants to make their own “Just say NO” note with the bulletin post-it to remember this invitation.

Offering Prayer

Jesus, thank you for the gift of your love. Help us to connect more fully to you, and to say “no” to the things that distance us from your hopes for our lives. May we choose your way forward with all that we are. Amen.

Communion Meditation

What courage it must have taken for the disciples to follow Jesus—to quite literally drop what they were doing and follow him! As we come to communion, think about what you might need to drop from your life to more closely follow Jesus. Before you partake in the communion elements, allow time to consider this question deeply in prayer. As you pray, you might find it helpful to open and close your hands. With this motion, imagine the things you are holding on to tightly, and what needs to be let go in order to better follow Christ’s call. When you are ready, come and receive the communion elements—bread and cup, nourishing you on the way with Jesus.

Prayer Station

Set out markers, construction paper, and several sets of scissors along with these instructions: Jesus called the disciples to follow him—to change the way they lived to be in step with the way Jesus lived. Trace the outline of your shoe or your foot and cut it out using the materials provided. On the cutout, share your responses to these questions:

- How could you make space in your life to listen for Jesus’ calling?
- What do you need to leave behind to follow Jesus?
- If you truly followed the call of Christ, where might it take you?

Music

Traditional

“He Leadeth Me”

“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

“Where He Leads Me”

“Softly and Tenderly” (consider replacing “dear sinner” with “dear children”)

“Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”

“All the Way, My Savior Leads Me”

“Be Thou My Vision”

Alternative

“Lead Me On” (Amy Grant)

“What Do You Want From Me” (Andra Moran)

“I Hear a Call” (Emmylou Harris)

“He Leadeth Me” (arr. Sarah Watkins)

“Stepping In” (Christopher Grundy)

“Savior Like a Shepherd” (Andra Moran)

“Be Thou My Vision”

Benediction

May God bless you, keep you and call you—and may you have the courage to answer the call!
Amen.



Children's Sermons

January 26, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23, Come and Follow Me

Theme: Faithful

Ask the children to raise your hand if they have. . .

been fishing?

caught any fish?

caught something other than fish?

What did you catch?

*(If you prefer, ask the children to just raise their hand if they caught something other than fish.
(Be prepared for any and all kinds of interesting answers!)*

Did any of you catch people?

No? Well, guess what? Jesus did!

Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee and decided he needed some helpers. Jesus saw two brothers: Simon—who is called Peter—and Andrew. The brothers were fishing. Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will show you how to fish for PEOPLE”. They left everything and followed Jesus. As they walked, they saw James and John. Jesus said to them too: “Follow me, and I will show you how to fish for PEOPLE.” They left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus called these helpers, disciples. Jesus and his disciples helped people who were sick, fed people who were hungry, and told everyone about the good news of God’s kingdom.

The disciples are showing us something called stewardship. Have you heard that word before?

Stewardship means taking care of others. The disciples are showing us how to practice stewardship when they leave everything behind to follow Jesus and help others.

January 26, 2020 Children's Sermon – 2

Jesus wants us to follow him just like the disciples did! Can you do that? I think we can!

Will you pray with me? Please repeat after me.

(invite congregation to pray too)

Dear God,

Thank you for people who teach us how to follow Jesus. Help us be helpers like the disciples, and show us how to practice stewardship just like the disciples did. Amen.



Youth Studies

Introduction

What is Stewardship? This question adorns many books on pastors' shelves, is the subject line of many emails sent to church leaders, and is a scary subject to discuss. Often stewardship is understood as only dealing with money. If that is the only aspect of stewardship that you know, I am sorry. If you understand money as the dominant aspect of stewardship, I am also sorry.

Money is *one* aspect of stewardship. Stewardship is much bigger than this one thing. Stewardship makes an appearance at the beginning of all creation. In the creation story of Genesis 1, as God is finalizing all of what creation is supposed to be about, God says to humanity, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."²

Dominion does not mean ownership. To understand what dominion means, it is wise to look at Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Ps 24:1) The world may be ours to live in, but the ownership is God's...we are renters. As renters, we have the task, the honor, the responsibility to be good tenants of all that God has created.

I am a big comic book fan. I have a couple favorites, and one of them is the Miles Morales version of Spiderman. I was awestruck by the *Spiderman into the Spiderverse* movie, and I am currently reading the Miles Morales version of Spiderman. At the end of the third comic of Miles Morales Spiderman (LGY#243), Miles writes the following thoughts in his journal; "'With great power there must also come great responsibility.' The first Spider-Man used to quote that at me all the time. I've been to other planets. I know androids and demigods. But real talk? Our neighbors are more important than alien invasions or global conspiracies. And the people around us are our great responsibility."³

I would add onto that thought that all of God's creation is our responsibility. If we are to truly understand the depth and nature of God's call to stewardship that began in the book of Genesis, then we must see that stewardship is not just about our money: it also is about our time, our neighbors, our enemies, the people like us, those unlike us, the ones we agree with,

² Genesis 1:28 (CEB)

³ Ahmed, S. Miles Morales: Spider-Man [Cartoon] New York, NY: Marvel, 2019.

the ones we disagree with, the Earth both in our backyard and across the world, the world currently, and the world to come. Stewardship is not a conservative or progressive idea. It is a God idea.

I desire to have us explore the different ways we might see stewardship played out in our lives by using Scripture to guide the conversation. Any time we study the Bible, it is important that we be aware of some things:

1. The time in which Scripture was written helped shape how scripture was heard in its time.
2. The Bible comes with a lot of baggage, as it has been used for generations for good and bad things.
3. The continuing revelation of God reminds us that we are not going to know everything God does. Jesus says as much in Matthew 24:36.
4. When studying the Bible, it is good to ask questions. Questions mean those who are hearing are trying to listen and understand. Jesus says that we are to humble ourselves like children to enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Children ask questions. Youth ask questions. Questions are good. Let us now question the idea of stewardship.

⁴ Matthew 18:2-4

January 26, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23, Come and Follow Me

Theme: Faithful

Read the Scripture text: Matthew 4:12-23

Your group may enjoy reading the lesson aloud. You or volunteers from the group can read the lesson.

There are five parts, each ending with a discussion question. For an hour time block, allow approximately 10-12 minutes for reading the part and answering the question. Allow time at the end to read the closing prayer together (and ask for prayer requests if you choose).

Section 1

The first disciples were dumb. Really, they were. We look at them with a sort of romantic view, but we would be better served to see them for what they are: ill-advised people making impetuous decisions that will have lifelong repercussions for them. They were dumb.

Imagine for a second that you are working at your job. It is tedious, tiresome, and relentless. In the middle of the day, you find yourself confronted with yet another person who is yelling at you for something you didn't do, or something that you had no control over. And then, suddenly, in the midst of being yelled at by customer number 1,000,000, a man shows up and says to you, "Come and follow me!" Tempting, isn't it? Anything to get out of what you are doing.

But then you remember why you are working. You have bills to pay, you have obligations, you are saving for a big purchase, etc. And you smile at the man and say, "I'd love to, but I have work to do here. Sorry." And the man leaves. When the grumpy customer leaves, you find yourself thinking about what it would have been like to follow that weird guy. You know that it is not a smart idea to do it, because, well, because. Logically, you know there is no point in entertaining what it might have been like to follow that guy at work. But you can't shake the thought. You know that to follow that man would be dumb by every measurable standard. If you know it is dumb, if you know that it is unwise, if you know that choosing to follow that man would have been incredibly scary, unnecessarily risky, and the complete opposite of everything *Stranger Danger* taught you, then why do you keep thinking about it? Yes, to follow that man would have been dumb...but what if. . .

The disciples were dumb, by every measurable standard of the day, and by the standards of our day. ***What is something dumb that you have done?***

Section 2

It is important to recognize that the wisdom in following Jesus is going to be considered foolish, uneducated, even dumb. It bears mentioning that just because something is dumb, doesn't mean we should do it. Sometimes, dumb is dumb. But sometimes, dumb can be faith-filled. It is not easy to know the difference between what is dumb and what is faith-filled.

Jesus' call to these first disciples follows a whirlwind set of experiences. Just a few months before this calling, Jesus was baptized by his cousin and in front of many, the Holy Spirit descended upon him and the voice of God spoke. It truly was one of those amazing experiences that we all clamor for: a clear and unmistakable interaction with God. Jesus then goes into the desert for forty days and is tempted three times by Satan. Oh, yeah: and Jesus was fasting during this time period. Hangry doesn't even begin to talk about it. When Jesus comes out of the desert, he finds out that his cousin has been arrested. ***Was Jesus afraid?***

Section 3

Jesus goes around proclaiming, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" If Jesus was afraid, he wasn't quiet: he spoke up. It would have been smart for him to be quiet. People knew who he was in relation to John the Baptist, and to go around talking, even a little bit, like John, was...well...dumb. Lay low, Jesus! Let things calm down before you do what you're going to do. Jesus seems to double down on the dumb; he starts recruiting people. The first disciples don't seem to negotiate with Jesus when they hear the call. There is no discussion about work week, expectations, hours, benefits, health insurance, pay scales, coworkers, travel expenses, anything. Nothing was discussed. Just "Come, follow me. And I will show you how to fish for people." So, is this 1) the best pitch meeting of all time, 2) the fishermen were really tired and at that point, anything seemed better than fish, or 3) something else is going on here.

It isn't often that people get such a clear call from God about what they are supposed to do. Many of us struggle to hear and experience the call of God in our lives. There is so much noise and distraction that I wonder if we even *hear* like the disciples did. ***How do you feel God speak to you?***

Section 4

The disciples hear Jesus call to them and they follow. Yes they were dumb. And they were faithful. By every measure of the world in which they lived, their decision to follow Jesus proved to be a problem. Some were imprisoned, some went into hiding, some made difficult journeys to other countries, and some were killed for their decision to follow Jesus.

Yet, here we are, nearly 2000 years after their choice to follow, and we are talking about their dumb choice. Either the disciples' decision was the dumbest decision ever, or there is something else going on in this story. It is often said that faith is belief without evidence. That argument would seem to be true here, at least on first glance. But what if there was something else going on, something that we don't see, yet we understand completely. What if there was

something else going on? What if following Jesus reached a deeper something than people could understand, at least until they follow?

Describing the disciples' decision to follow Jesus as dumb is meant to have us examine and question why we follow Jesus. If we follow Jesus without examining *why* we follow Jesus then maybe we are the dumb ones. For the disciples, each day following Jesus gave them reasons to examine why they followed Jesus. Each examination would lead to more and more questions and they would ask those questions of Jesus. Yes, following Jesus seemed to not have any questions at the beginning, but the questions would flow later. Yes, following Jesus would lead to hardship, times of doubt, fear, and wondering what they were doing.

This is a key stewardship concept for people of faith. Stewardship is working to assure that using what God has given us, and seeing our resources as entrusted to us, we live a life focused on following God's call. This call may seem problematic, it may seem contrary to what we would like to do, it may call us to suspend our earthly logic and rely on the logic of God, and it will be scary. It might be seen as dumb, and our communities may not understand or support what we feel, but we sense somehow that we are supposed to do something that we just can't explain.

While it would be easy—romantic, even—to just do what we want, it is also key to see that these first disciples had others with them. The journey to follow God is not one that is done alone. It is one that asks of us to assure that we have people whom we can rely upon, who love us, and seek to help us grow into who God has created us to be. ***What would your community look like?***

Part 5

Indeed it is faithful to have others be a part of your journey, even if your journey calls you to live radically different than you would otherwise choose to live. Good stewardship is trusting that the call from God will lead where God desires. The question is, Will we follow?

The disciples, dumb by the world's standards, modeled a new standard: a godly standard that may require people to do things that they wouldn't have thought possible or even logical. We are also called, just as the disciples were. How will we respond to the call? It may call on people to leave their safe lives and embark on something completely unknown. It may call upon us to change how we see the world. ***What is the scariest thing you think God could call you to do?***

Closing prayer

Pray together: Lord, may we hear your call and follow. Steer us into your life so that we may reflect your call in this world. May we show your grace. Amen.



Adult Studies

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23, Come and Follow Me

Theme: Faithful

STEPPING OUT ON FAITH

Opening prayer (read together or by one person) – 2 minutes:

Good and loving God, thank you for your son, Jesus, who faithfully followed your guidance and proclaimed the good news to your people. Guide our hearts and minds as we begin this stewardship journey that, like the disciples, we might faithfully follow and do what you have called us to do. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray, Amen.

Sharing by mutual invitation – 5 minutes: What does “faithful” mean to you?

Read aloud – 3 minutes: Matthew 4:12-23

Sharing by mutual invitation – 5-10 minutes: What word or phrase in this text caught your eye and why?

Re-read aloud – 1 minute: Matthew 4:18-22

The Text in Context – 7 minutes

Without a doubt, Jesus was faithful to the call to ministry that God had placed on him. In Matthew 3, we read how Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River. Immediately after that, Jesus spent forty days and nights fasting in the wilderness. At the end of that time, the Devil tempted Jesus, but Jesus resisted. After being ministered to by angels, Jesus began his ministry in Galilee.

Truly Jesus faithfully responded to his calling. We wouldn't expect anything else from the Son of God. We are not Jesus, however. We are mere mortals. There is no way we can ever live up to the expectations that God placed on Jesus. When it comes to stewardship, we can strive to faithfully live up to the expectations that Jesus placed on his disciples.

As the text tells us, Andrew, Simon (Peter), James, and John were all fishermen. It wasn't that they loved to fish—it was their career. In an area that is dry and very rocky, agriculture (farming the land) was not a good option. Fish (along with bread) were a major source of sustenance for the Galilean community and a fundamental part of the economy during Jesus' time. Most fishing families were poor, barely making it each day because of the fees, taxes, and toll rates that were imposed on fishing families by the Roman Empire.¹³ It was a hard, tedious career that took its toll on the fishermen and their families. Some days you didn't catch anything. Luke talks about such a time: "When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.'" (Lk 5:4-5) The writer of Mark also tells us about storms that could come up unexpectedly, threatening their lives: "On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" (Mk 4:35-38) It was hard, it was dangerous, and it was a job that people were willing to do to support their family. Yet when Jesus shows up and says, "Follow me," four fishermen drop everything they are doing to follow him, leaving their family in a financially unstable situation.

There's something about that command, "follow me." The Greek word— *deute* (δεῦτε)—is used seven times in Matthew's Gospel with this instance being the first. The next time it is used is in Matthew 11:28 when Jesus says to those following him, "*Come to me*, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (emphasis added). All the other occurrences are translated as *come* in the New Revised Standard Version. The Greek is also in the imperative tense. This wasn't Jesus asking, "Would you like to follow me?" Jesus essentially said, "You need to come after (i.e., follow) me now." His tone meant that he only expected one response from those he was speaking to: drop everything that they were doing and get into step behind him.

Faithfully, those who heard the call responded and did just that, despite the implications it had on their lives. We know that Simon (Peter) had at least a wife and the mother of his wife that he supported: "After leaving the synagogue [Jesus] entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her. Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them." (Lk 4:38-39) James and John helped their father, Zebedee, in a thriving business that occasionally required hiring day laborers: "As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him."

¹³ Alicia J. Batten, "Fishing Economy in the Sea of Galilee", n.p. [cited 2 Sep 2019]. Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/places/related-articles/fishing-economy-in-the-sea-of-galilee>

(Mk 1:19-20) People relied on these four fishermen who stepped out on faith and walked away from their jobs to follow a man they barely knew.

The Text in Our Context – 5 minutes

People today choose to leave their lives (or careers) behind and follow Jesus for different reasons. Some do it out of fear. Something terrifying happens in their lives and they promise to follow Jesus if God will safely get them out of their situation. The fear of death is a strong motivator for some to lead a life of ministry. Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century German theologian and reformer of the church, was preparing to be a lawyer. On July 17, 1505, Luther suddenly abandoned the study of law and entered a monastery. Luther attributed this sudden change to a violent thunderstorm that terrified him so much that he vowed he would become a monk if he survived. After surviving the storm, that is exactly what he did.

Others follow Jesus for financial reasons. They see ministry as a way to support their family or get rich. There have been many instances over the years of televangelists who proclaim the word simply to fill their bank accounts. In 2019, HBO started a new original series based on this concept. *The Righteous Gemstones* “tells the story of a world-famous televangelist family with a long tradition of deviance, greed and charitable work.”¹⁴ A report published in 2010 looked at preachers who don’t believe, providing case studies on five unbelieving ministers. Although their “small and self-selected” sample of ministers represents a microcosm of the theological collapse at the heart of many churches and denominations,¹⁵ it is a significant look at the integrity of the Christian church. Even that is not something new; in 1739 Rev. Gilbert Tennent preached a sermon titled “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,” where he describes unbelieving pastors as “a great curse and judgment.”¹⁶

Although Jesus can use those who follow out of fear or for financial reasons (e.g., Martin Luther with the Protestant Reformation), Jesus commands people to follow him faithfully. They should not follow him because of what they can get out of it (e.g., salvation or financial blessings), but because of what they can offer to God’s ministry: their time, talents, and treasures (resources). When Jesus called Andrew, Simon (Peter), James, and John, he didn’t promise them riches or salvation. All Jesus said he would do is make them fish for people. They faithfully followed and trusted that Jesus would provide for them. Jesus calls each of us to faithfully follow him as well, asking us to be good stewards of all that God has provided for us.

¹⁴ <https://www.hbo.com/content/hbweb/en/the-righteous-gemstones/about.html> [cited 2 Sep 2019].

¹⁵ Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Preachers Who Don’t Believe—The Scandal of Apostate Pastors,” n.p. [cited 2 Sep 2019]. Online: <https://albertmohler.com/2010/03/18/clergy-who-dont-believe-the-scandal-of-apostate-pastors/>

¹⁶ Gilbert Tennent, “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,” n.p. [cited 2 Sep 2019]. Online: http://www.sounddoctrine.net/Classic_Sermons/Gilbert%20Tennent/danger_of_unconverted.pdf

Reflecting on the Text – 20 minutes (use mutual invitation)

- How do you think those around Andrew, Simon (Peter), James, and John reacted when they walked away from their jobs to follow Jesus?
- If Jesus walked into your work, school, or home and commanded you to drop everything and follow him, how do you think you would respond?
- How do you think those around you (e.g. family, friends, employers, or teachers) would respond if you suddenly told them?
- What have you given up to follow Jesus? Think in terms of the three 'T's: time, talent, treasures (financial resources).
- What else might you give up as you faithfully steward what God has given you?

Closing Prayer – 1 minute

Creator God, thank you for our time together today and for your word and Spirit that guides our lives. As we move through this year of stewardship, continue to instill in us a faithful heart so that we might step out in faith as we seek to serve and follow your son. It's in Jesus name that we pray, Amen.