



This To That

Matthew 4:18-22

What if Peter, Andrew, James and John had said, "That sounds good, Jesus, how about we come around every now and then?" What if they had said, "That sounds good, Jesus, but you know this is a nice place? Let's just set up headquarters here and let everyone come to us. That way we can still fish in the morning and preach in the evening. We can have both this and that."

Jesus simply says to have that you must leave this. There is a letting go. There is a moment of decision of following that becomes a decisive moment.

The question remains then, why would anyone want to leave this and follow that? Back to Bonhoeffer's question. Why follow Jesus? If this is known, secure, filled with support and routine, why would anyone want to leave this and follow that which is unknown and requires a loss before there is gain? Why would anyone want to leave this for that?

There is only one answer and it is Bonhoeffer's answer. Because it is Jesus who is calling. This is not just another opportunity. This is not just another good idea you had. This is not simply doing what others are doing. This is not something you would like to try because everything else you have tried did not work. There is something more here. This is Jesus calling us to the unknown and a life of faith in Him.

There is only one reason to move from this to that in our lives, whatever that means for you and that reason is "that" is where Jesus is going. We cannot follow Jesus and stay where we are. Jesus is on the move and if we would follow Him, we must move with Him.

In the book, *Living the Resurrection* by Eugene Peterson, he tells the story of a little girl named Charity. Charity is a five year old who loves her grandmothers. One of her grandmothers takes spiritual nurturing very seriously. So when she visits she talks to Charity about God. On one occasion after this grandmother had left, her other Grandmother came to visit. At five o'clock in the morning, Charity went into the guestroom and got into bed with her other Grandmother and said "Let's not have any God-Talk, I believe God is everywhere, lets just get on with life."

Well, that could be interpreted two ways. Charity might have been saying enough God-talk. I know God is everywhere, which is God is the background of everything so there is no need to talk about God any more. That is settled now, lets just get on to doing what we want to do.

Peterson suggests that Charity was saying something else. He suggests she was saying enough with the talk; let's get on to the living where God is. Peterson believes Charity's comment is more about living a life that is filled with God and not simply a life where there is God-talk.

Let's admit it, sometimes our faith can easily become nothing more than God-talk. Now there is nothing wrong with God-talk, if it is connected to God-walk. But when our faith is simply God-talk, then we get stuck at God-talk. We know God is there in the background somewhere and that is enough. When we believe we can now get on with the life we choose to live and our faith is simply some God-talk, we have missed the point.

Let's not have any more God-talk; God is everywhere... so let's get on with the living.



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TRINITY PULPIT

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*, he ask the important question of "Why?" in regards to Matthew 4:18-22. Why would Andrew, Peter, James and John pull up their boats, drop their nets and follow Jesus? Why that day? What happened on that day that made this call to "follow" so compelling? Was it that they were looking for something new? Or was it that Jesus just caught them on a good day? Or was it due to they had come up empty fishing? Or they were tired of fishing and so any opportunity would have been welcomed? We all know that feeling. We all know the feeling of a hard Monday or an exhausting Friday that sends us home to look at job sites and wishing or day dreaming that maybe there is something more, or at least something different out there just for us. Yet, there does not seem to be a hint of discontent with their lives.

Peter and Andrew are described as casting their nets into the sea for they were fishermen. I think that is more than an objective description. You might see me standing on a boat with a rod and reel in my hand, but believe me I am no fisherman. You can have the appearance without the expertise. This word seems to be more than descriptive of their activity and more descriptive of their very lives. They were fishermen.

That phrase is full of meaning. This is who they were as individuals. This is what they knew and this is what they did. Their whole lifestyle of being fishermen defines Peter and Andrew at this moment in their lives. There is not an indication of discontent. The call to come and follow was not a welcome call because of discontent.

What was it about the call that pricked the imagination of these men that day? Maybe, it was the promise Jesus offered? The promise Jesus offers is anything but clear and certain. Jesus does not say come and follow me and

I will train you to be the catalyst that will rewrite history. Or come and follow me and we will change the world and centuries after your death and men and women will speak of you, build churches with your names upon them and read the story this day. You will be remembered and you will be famous. You will make your mark on this world if you follow me. That would all be true, but that was not the call.

In fact, Jesus' call is a veiled play on words. I will make you fishers of men. What does that mean? It is not the promise of the call that makes these four leave behind all they have known and follow this itinerant preacher.

Did they follow Him to join the crowd? If you read the gospels we get some different pictures of a time frame of the calling of these four. Matthew and Mark place the calling of the four after the baptism and temptation. It is very early in the ministry of Jesus. Luke has the calling of the four following Jesus when He returns to His synagogue in Nazareth and after healing many. Luke also gives us the story of Peter and Jesus and the miraculous catch. Luke suggests that there was more interaction that day. In fact, Luke tells us there are crowds and there is this miraculous catch that impresses Peter, Andrew, James and John. It is at this moment Jesus calls them and they pull their boats to the shore and leave everything to follow Jesus.

John tells the story a little different, as well. John gives us insight into Andrew and we are told that Andrew is one of John the Baptists disciples. Andrew followed Jesus and then found Peter to inform him we have found the Christ.

The calling of the four has different emphasis in the four gospels. There are some indications that there were others following or you might say tagging along. The crowds were not really following as much as they were curious, by

being drawn to the show that was Jesus' traveling healing show. Those that were tagging along were not really followers because they are the same type of people who fell away quickly when the teaching became difficult.

This call in Matthew was not simply come and see. That was how it began in John's gospel. The call is to follow. The call was a move from this life to that life.

So Dietrich Bonhoeffer would conclude, in the Cost of Discipleship, that the four followed Jesus that day because it was Jesus. It was not the promise of the future, or to go along with others, it was for the sake of the call. It was because it was Jesus who did the calling that the four would abandon their identity and embrace a new identity as followers of Jesus.

This calling of the first disciples is a story of moving from this to that. Life is filled with moments when we move from this to that. Let me define this and that for us today.

This is our present situation and moment. This is what we know. This is the definition of our lives and the description of our lives. That is what we are being called to do and be. That is what is yet to occur to us and be experienced by us.

Most of the time, when we speak of moving from this to that, we think in terms of observable activities and physical location. To move from this to that for many of us might mean a move in location, from one home to another home, from one city to another city or part of town. It might mean a vocation change. To move from this to that for us might mean a new job or new career. To move from this to that might mean a new school or it might mean a new relationship. When we think about moving from this to that, we think about those measurable and observable characteristics of life.

To be sure in the calling of the four all of these observable characteristics are present. They are moving from one vocation to another. They are moving from one location to another. They are moving from daily relationships to new relationships. They are moving from one identity to another identity. All of this is true for the four called at the Sea of Galilee.

However, for our reflection today I want us to not be so concrete. We might discover that our calling from this to that may require such changes, but I want us to think more spiritually today about this call on our lives. I also want to hesitate from describing this call in too many terms. Simply because I want God to

speak to you in particular of what it means to move from this to that in your life. Even now, I believe that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you and defining in your mind what this to that means to you.

I believe Jesus is always calling us from this, who we are right now, to that, who God wants us to be. Yet, the courage to lay down our nets, pull up our boats and follow is sometimes very hard. Let's think about the difficulties of moving from this to that.

We need to know that leaving this is always a hard decision. When we know God is calling us to something more in our lives, it is always hard to leave behind who we have been. It is difficult for several reasons.

First, because this is what we know, there might be some difficulty with where we are and who we are now but at least we know the landscape. You might have a hard job but you know whom you can trust, you know the routine, you know how to please those in authority over you. Leaving this, who we are now, to move to that, who God is calling us to be is difficult because this is what we know.

It is hard because this is how we are known. Look at the four disciples, again. Being fishermen is all they know. This is how others know them. This is their identity in this fishing village. This is probably how they were describing themselves and it is definitely how others defined them. They were fishermen. We are aware that our identity is not only who we think we are, but in some ways who others define us to be. So, we are defined in relationships. We are defined as fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, friends, brothers and sisters. We are defined in our relationship of vocation. He is a carpenter, a builder, a painter, a salesman; she is a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or preacher. It is hard to move from this to that because this is how we are defined. It is what we know and how we are known.

This is a place of comfort. N.T. Wright, in his description of Peter, Andrew, James and John, described them as small businessmen. He says they are those who work not for luxury, but for enough to care for their family and maybe a little more. Wright describes them as modestly secure. I like that word because that really is the word that describes most of us. We are modestly secure and security means a lot. We might not have it all, but we are secure and that is more than most. That security is not only material, it is relational and a comfort about our lives. This security is found in having enough and it is also found in support and routine. Those described here

in Matthew had support. There was the support of family. They were not in this alone. They had someone else in this enterprise. For Peter and Andrew were brothers. However, James and John seem to be a part of a larger support system. They worked with their father and we knew their mother, who may have been the first helicopter moms, supported them so much that she would also travel with Jesus and even took the opportunity to look out for her sons when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom that was to come. They had support, they were not alone.

They had the security of routine. Chances are their whole life had been the same routine. Everyday they got up and went to the sea. Everyday they unfolded the nets, prepared them, mended them, rowed out into the water and casted their nets. It was a routine they could have done in their sleep.

Now some of us hear this description and it sounds mundane. We want life to be more exciting than this, until of course the fear of that change and excitement actually occurs. Most of us, when we hear of this description of these four, realize how easy it is for our lives to be just like this and it does not sound bad. We are secure financially, we have the support of others and there is a routine and rhythm to life. The hard part of being called from this, who we are right now, to that, who God is calling us to be, is that sometimes there is a disruption in one of these areas of life.

Who else may know us and know that we may need to change? God might call us to have faith financially and we see it as risk. God might call us to a place that requires us to leave some of our support behind. God might call us to a new routine in our daily living.

It is hard to move from this, who we are right now, to that, who God is calling us to be because this is who we are and what we know.

Yet, God called the four from this to that. Jesus called them from fishermen to fishers of men. What do we know about "that"? What can we be sure of about whom God is calling us to be? First, we know "that" it is unknown. It is unknown because it takes faith to take the first step. We must have faith to please God

and faith means to begin to walk when there might only be one step visible, while everything else might be dark. There is an unknown aspect to that which God calls us to be.

Abram is called to leave all that he knew and all that he had become and go to a place where God would show him what was next in his life. It was a promise that was completely based on God making the promise. It was the place to go to because it was God's promise. God simply tells Abram go to this place and I will reveal on the way.

Our disciples are called to simply follow. They are not told of the future or exactly what awaited them. As Wright puts it "did they know that they would be crucified like their master? Did James know that Herod would put him to death? Did John know he would leave all this support and security to end life alone in exile? Did Peter know that one day there would be a huge church built over his tomb? Did Andrew know that whole nations would regard him as their patron saint?" They neither saw the glory nor the pain. That to which God is calling us, requires that we embrace the unknown that is revealed on the way.

If we are going to experience what God has for us in "that", then we have to let go of this. We cannot do that here. We cannot embrace that, while trying to hold on to this. How we wish that were true. In fact, we rationalize all the time that God really does not want us to let go of this to claim that which God has for us. We convince ourselves we don't really have to change to be pleasing to God. We convince ourselves that we can live like the rest of the world and somehow still be pleasing to God. We try our best to convince ourselves that we don't need to change our routine, our priorities, our lifestyles, our allegiances, our thinking or our desires. We are very good at convincing ourselves that we can have all God has for us without any sacrifice or change.

Yet, Jesus says if you want to come after me you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for me you will find it.

IF WE ARE GOING TO EXPERIENCE WHAT GOD HAS FOR US IN "THAT", THEN WE HAVE TO LET GO OF THIS. WE CANNOT DO THAT HERE. WE CANNOT EMBRACE THAT, WHILE TRYING TO HOLD ON TO THIS. HOW WE WISH THAT WERE TRUE. IN FACT, WE RATIONALIZE ALL THE TIME THAT GOD REALLY DOES NOT WANT US TO LET GO OF THIS TO CLAIM THAT WHICH GOD HAS FOR US.