

*14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.*

Once I was a great drama director. The actors were high school students from Goodrich, North Dakota. I was the pastor of the Lutheran church there. Because the high school was small, with 50 or 60 students in the whole high school, there was no drama department; the students had absolutely no experience with acting. I took those raw recruits, shaped them and molded them into the Charleton Hestons of religious drama. Every play was a success as they did exactly what I said.

So when I came to my second parish, a larger town, with sixty or seventy high school students who belonged to our congregation, I knew that there would be no limit to the brilliant performances ahead. I would teach these raw recruits how to act. I picked a play, assigned the parts and began the rehearsals. But nothing worked. I told them what to do, but they did not do it. For now I was working with students who were winning the highest awards in drama in the state of North Dakota. The best high school actresses and actors in the whole state, and I could do nothing with them. Their skills and experience kept them from listening to me.

Jesus did not consult the rabbi at First Synagogue of Capernaum asking for the best and the brightest young students, already trained in the scriptures.

Jesus did not check the records to see who had years of faithful attendance piled up, the best givers, teachers, administrators.

Nor did he seek the services of the Rabbi himself, the Rabbi who surely knew more about scriptures and the promises of God than anyone else in that part of Galilee.

No, Jesus went down to the lake where hands were not soft from holding the scriptures but hardened and calloused from years of handling the nets. He went to where the men knew little about how to pray properly, but daily heard one another complain about life and tell the stories that men tell. He went down to the Sea of Galilee where men knew everything there is to know about fishing and nothing at all about preaching.

He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Jesus called. Peter and Andrew, James and John followed. He spoke. They obeyed. They left behind their whole world, all in which they had been trained - nets, family, friends with whom they shared their days, all left behind.

With these four raw recruits and seven more Jesus would lay the foundation of his church. The words that he would give them they would speak, the words that he would speak they would obey. Jesus directed, and they who knew nothing about the drama he had planned, would act out their parts. While rabbis were still teaching their little flock, and longtime faithful in the synagogues were doing the things they had always done, fishers of men were filling the nets of the kingdom. The synagogue in Capernaum was finally swept away, forgotten, as the church of Jesus Christ captured the whole Roman Empire.

Sometimes we think that if we just knew more and understood more and were all better trained we could really be effective workers for our Lord. If only we knew more Bible, or better communication techniques, or more about parenting, then things would really happen. So we gather here and prepare ourselves, preach to ourselves, encourage ourselves. Our Lord says, "Go into all the world and make disciples," but we are so busy getting everything right that we never go out. Jesus says, "He who loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it," but we have so much built up here that it is hard to risk any more. We hang on, paying salaries, fixing roofs, meeting budgets. The longer we have been a part of Christ's church, the more training and education and serving we have done in that church, the harder it is to hear our Lord's word. And do it. For the blanket of habit weighs upon us so heavily and feels so warm, and comforting.

Raw recruits. Where will Jesus find them? Here? You? Me?

If so, then following will begin with repentance. The Greek word means to turn - to turn away from one thing, and toward another. Those who were regarded as sinners in Jesus

day knew how to do that. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, turned from grasping and holding on to his money, to giving and sharing. Jesus made him new.

But the rich young ruler who was so proud of his accomplishments in doing good and keeping God's law, he was unable to follow Jesus. He could not turn.

It may not be our sins that keep us from following our Lord, but the very things that we most pride ourselves in. Our good deeds, our importance in the church, our being basically satisfied with ourselves, these are the great enemies of our Lord's work in us. Not our ungodliness but our accomplishments in the church become chains that enslave us. We know so much that we can no longer learn, no longer hear the voice of our Lord. Before he speaks we know what he is going to say. So we no longer listen.

Repent. Once Paul listed all his religious accomplishments, his training, his knowledge, his service. But then he said, "I count it all as refuse for the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord."

Repent - turn away from everything that you would like to hold on to so that Jesus may do something new in you.

And believe the gospel, the good news. The Lord is making everything new through his Word, Jesus Christ. God is speaking a new world and a new you into existence this day through Jesus. Sin, death, Satan have no power when God speaks. They are all put to death when God speaks and his people hear and do his word.

God's word is a new word for a brand new you. You are not called to hold onto yesterday's truths and yesterday's answers but to hear God's word this day and believe in it with all your heart. For when you hear and believe then God's kingdom has come in you, and goes out that door with you into all the world.