

## Written Copy: Matthew 4:18-20 "Called to Serve"

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### Text: Matthew 4:18-20

<sup>18</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

### Exegetical Statement

Following John the Baptist's incarceration, Jesus returns to Galilee to fulfill Scripture as the light of the revelation of God's salvation plan beginning first in that area. He continues preaching the same message as John the Baptist: "Repent: for the reign and rule of heaven has come near. He is calling people to turn away from the rule of their sinful selfish hearts in their lives and turn to Him by faith to receive forgiveness and restoration. This is the work of conversion that is done by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel Message of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. This work is ongoing in the believer's life as we are declared justified as we cling to Christ as our atoning sacrifice. This is the Spirit reigning and ruling daily in us. He begins to call those men who were to follow Him, learn from Him, and would eventually give their lives in testimony to His Gospel as Apostles. The effect of His call, as the powerful word of God, is to leave their occupations behind in place of this new vocation. While His call to the Church today may not be to leave all our vocations behind, we too are called to a new vocation of discipleship whereby we listen and learn from Him, and share the Gospel Message that brings His reign and rule into the hearts of others. We also see Him providing a foreshadowing of what is to come in His healing of every kind of physical, emotional, and spiritual affliction. This work is done amongst us in part now, but will be fully completed in the Resurrection.

### Focus Statement:

We were called to faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel Message of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. This message brings the reign and rule of Christ to your heart and life. It moves the center of our life from being on us to placing Jesus first, so that all our vocations begin to serve Him. It is the message of repentant faith whereby we remain justified by our holding fast to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for me and for all. We are renewed in this call through Word and Sacrament.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

While we may recognize that in our call to faith we enjoy the free gift of grace, we sometimes forget that our call to believe gives us a new vocation to be His disciples, called to serve as His Church: learning and sharing the Gospel Message of repentant faith.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Grow in our recognition and participation in the work of the Church we called into: using our time, talents, and treasures as tools of the Spirit to share the Gospel Message that brings and renews the reign and rule of Christ that is repentant faith in us and others we minister to.

### Subject Sentence: Called to serve as His Church w/time, talents, treasures

## Introduction

In one of my former vocations as a line cook at Double Eagle Restaurant at Sylvan Glen Golf Course in Troy Michigan, the worst shift to work was the closing shift on Sunday evening. Most of the time it would be slow, and the time would just drag by. A lot of times we had run out of stuff because it was so busy on Friday and Saturday nights. This made the diners unhappy to hear we were unable to make what they wanted to order, especially if it was the Special of the Day. The customer's valid argument was, "Why do you have that as the special when you don't have enough to serve?" And since the customers were unhappy, they let their waiters know they were unhappy, which of course made the waiters unhappy. Since they couldn't unload their frustration upon the diners, they came back and unloaded on us, the cooks. Frustration and unhappiness often ruled the evening.

I was never so happy as when closing time was approaching. The last hour of a Sunday shift often was dead. In the kitchen we could get a head start on the cleaning so that when closing time hit, we would be ready to run out the door and head home. Since I was in college at the time I was anxious to get home and get on my homework and study for a class first thing in the morning.

The most frustrating thing was when it was 15 minutes to close, or 10 minutes to close, 5 minutes to close, the restaurant is empty, we basically have everything wrapped, put away, cleaned up, even have our coats on, and then in walks a group of diners. And you have to undo a lot of what you had wrapped up to serve them. The bigger the dining party, the worse it was. We had one manager who would let diners come in even after we were supposed to be closed. One time we were headed out to our cars, and he called us to come back in because he had set a table. If I didn't need the money so badly, I would've just kept on walking! Not only did we have to turn everything back on, unwrap stuff, dirty pots and pans, but the dishwasher had already left. We had to wait for the people to finish eating and make sure their plates and silverware were run through the dishwasher! That was so frustrating!!!

Perhaps you've had that experience in your career when you are ready to go, and someone brings you a last-minute thing. Or you are starting your shift already with a day plus worth of work and here comes someone bringing you more to do. It's even worse when you don't see this work as actually being your responsibility, but you're shouldered with it because the person who should be doing it didn't show up that day.

Perhaps for you all that is over and done with and you're enjoying retirement. You enjoy the freedom you have in your schedule; you can stay up as late as you want, get up as early or late as you want, nap during the day, take up a hobby without worrying about it conflicting with a job. The last thing you want to do is take on another job that cuts into your free time, something you regard not as enjoyment or satisfying, but work and responsibility that you didn't sign up for.

## Aversion to the Call to Serve as His Church

Perhaps these are some of the reasons that people don't want to become involved in the ministry and mission of the Church. By and large in any congregation a smaller percentage of the people do a larger percentage of the work. But what else is behind this aversion to becoming involved in the work and ministry of the Church?

First and foremost, there is a misunderstanding regarding our life in Christ and our call to do good works of service in God's kingdom. We hear that our life in Christ is the free gift of grace from Him, we do nothing to earn it or deserve it. And that is the truth of what we confess and believe. When it comes to salvation and forgiveness of sins, Christ did it all and you do nothing. But with that ringing in my ears, I can apply that to my life lived out in faith toward Christ to mean all I am is a passive recipient with no responsibilities beyond maybe attending worship, if even that. I could see Christ's death and resurrection as declaring me to be free to do what I want to do.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** <sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** <sup>9</sup> **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

As Lutherans we love these verses, as we should. We say to ourselves: "My salvation is not the result of works. Works don't factor into it. Wonderful words!" And this is true. But then we take it a step further arguing, "I'm free from responsibility to be involved in the life and mission of the Church! I can come here, worship, receive the body and blood my Savior who suffered in agony to save me, and go home and go back to my life."

**Ephesians 2:10** <sup>10</sup> **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

We wish Paul would've stopped before he wrote verse 10. What is Paul saying here? Why is it Jesus saved us, yet left us here in this broken, fallen, sinful world? Not to continue on in a life where only I matter, centered only on what I want to do, and what others can do for me. He saved us to be His "workmanship", His new Creation, His servants to do good works that reflect our faith in Him, not to be saved but because we are saved. According to Paul, these works are not optional, they are what God prepared for us to do even before He saved us. It's how we are supposed to walk or live out our life in faith towards Him. His call to faith is followed by a call to serve.

## His Call to Serve as Disciples

When Christ called you to faith He called you to a new vocation: that of being a member of His Church doing the work of sharing the Gospel to build up faith: yours and your brother and sister in Christ, so that we can go out and be fishers of people.

As Lutherans we describe vocation as not just your career, how you made a living in the world. Your vocations are all the roles and life responsibilities that God has given you. With that definition your vocations can be: spouse, parent-grandparent-great grandparent, child, neighbor, friend, worker/laborer, citizen of this country. But out of all those, one of the most important ones that is often overlooked is to be a member of Christ's body the Church.

Even if you are not technically on the membership rolls here or with any other congregation you are still a member of His Church. You were called into that role when you were called to believe in Jesus. We can see that in **Matthew 4:18-20** <sup>18</sup> **While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.** <sup>19</sup> **And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."** <sup>20</sup> **Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

When Jesus first approached Peter, he wasn't all that keen on being given another vocation. The Gospel of Luke provides additional details to this encounter with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew were out all night and caught nothing. They just want to wrap things up for the morning and go home and rest. But Jesus climbs into Peter's boat and begins teaching about the kingdom of God He has come to bring. Peter hears it, but it hasn't made a big impact upon him, at least not yet. He is definitely not looking for a new vocation. What changes Peter's heart, mind, and life is the miraculous catch of fish that Jesus orchestrates at the wrong time of day. That brings Peter to his knees and face to face with the reality of the situation. In some way that he doesn't completely understand, He is in the presence of the holiness of God, and he is a dirty, miserable, unworthy sinner. But Jesus extends the hand of grace and forgiveness and issues the Call: **"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."**

This is not just a call to faith. It's the call into a new vocation, the call of discipleship. It doesn't matter if you are officially on the rolls of membership in this congregation or another congregation. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you and works repentant faith in your heart, you are on the rolls as a member of Jesus kingdom, His Church, His body on earth. And that makes you a disciple, a follower of Him with the vocation of being a "fisher of men", a sharer of the Gospel. And that can happen in any of the vocational rolls you have been given where through Word and action you point to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How do you go about doing this? Using all the gifts He has equipped you with to be His disciple which includes your time, talents, and treasures. Jesus Christ sacrificed His very life to save you from sin, death, and the devil. In doing so He has called us to a life of repentant faith that is the greatest gift you could ever receive. The response to this that the Holy Spirit works in your heart and in mine is to share this wonderful gift with others, and work to keep one another steadfast in this faith.

All the gifts that He has given into your hands: your time, talents, and treasures are certainly given to you to support your life in this world. Our sinful tendency is to use them strictly to build our own kingdom, take care of ourselves first and foremost, and if there is any left then maybe we can help others. If not, oh well.

What was discipleship like for Peter, Andrew, James, and John? Did they give Jesus what was left over? Or did they drop everything and take up this new life, this new vocation that He had given them? Now they were called to be Apostles, and in doing so they left behind their previous vocation of being fishermen. You and I are not called to be Apostles. That vocation is no longer needed in Jesus' kingdom. We are called to serve as His disciples. And for us that means sacrificing some of our time, talent, and treasures to answer His call. It means being involved in the work and ministry of the Church even when it's not convenient. It may mean adding additional time and responsibility to your busy week. It means setting aside a portion of your income that you could use for other things to support the work of the Church that you are unable to do on your own with your gifts and talents. It means being **“his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

## **His Call to Repentant Faith as Power to Serve**

It's a tall order, isn't it? It's not something we naturally want to do. It's definitely not on the agenda of our sinful selfish heart. But it is what our Lord and Savior calls us to do when His Spirit brings faith to bear on our hearts and minds as He calls us to serve in Christ's kingdom, His Church.

Because this side of eternity we are always saints and sinners, you and I will not always be on board with this Call to Serve in His kingdom. Opportunities will arise and we find ourselves saying, “No.” We will struggle with being generous with our time, talents, and treasures. Does that mean that we aren't really members of His kingdom? Does that mean that He is withholding forgiveness from us because we are withholding using the gifts He has given us for His glory? Absolutely not!

That very message of grace and forgiveness, the Gospel Message, declares otherwise. Remember: you are forgiven, but not because of what you do or fail to do. You are forgiven because you have been called into a repentant faith relationship with Christ. That means you've been given the faith to trust that Jesus suffering and death is your atoning sacrifice for all the things you have done that you shouldn't do, as well as all things you didn't do but should've. Jesus' death and resurrection tell you that all those sins have been erased from your permanent record, and God no longer sees them. As long as you are in repentant faith toward Jesus you are declared to be justified-just as if you never sinned. That's how God sees you.

So, when the Holy Spirit points out how you've failed to serve Him as a disciple of Christ, He does so in order that you recognize and admit your failure, then see Jesus' work on the cross and in the resurrection witnessing to you that it has all been forgiven. Then in that forgiveness, with Holy Spirit empowered love, gratitude, and thankfulness, take hold of the next opportunity to serve in His kingdom as His workmanship with the tools He has given you.

## Conclusion

It's often a busy life we live, and many times we don't want to add one more thing to it. Many of you have worked hard for a long time and deserve times of relaxation and enjoyment for yourself. But all of you who believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior have been called into His kingdom to be His disciples, not because of anything you have done or could do, but because of all Jesus Christ has done for you as your atoning sacrifice, and has given to you through the greatest gift of love, faith to trust in Him as Lord and Savior. He has made you a new person in Christ. He has saved you and left you on this earth to be His disciple.

**Ephesians 2:10 <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

We have been called to faith to be workers in His kingdom, doing those things He gave us gifts and talents to do. And we don't always do them as we should. But that grace and mercy by which Jesus saved us is the power to restore us and keep us in steadfast faith toward Him, and to keep us growing in a life of service to Him as fishers of people, His Church. He wants to use you to bring the light of His Gospel to others here in this place, and out into this sin darkened world. Amen.