

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
January 22, 2017**

## **Aha!**

# **Finding My Purpose: “Follow Me!”**

**Matthew 4:12-24**

*To watch the Brandon Marshall video that was shown at the beginning of the message, go to [open.life.church/footballsunday](http://open.life.church/footballsunday) and scroll down to find his video.*

Pray for clarity! How would you have felt if someone had said that to you? Brandon Marshall was already a Jesus follower. But somehow the woman on the plane realized that Brandon had a lot to learn before he could truly follow Jesus and fulfill the purpose for which God had created him. Listening to his story reminds me that we often have to go into the darkness of unclarity before we will be ready to follow Jesus.

What do I mean by that?

Well let's just track Jesus' ministry so far. This is the way our gospel lesson for today begins:

*<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—*

He had just turned 30, old enough to become a rabbi or teacher. He went down to Judea to be baptized by John the Baptist. He started his ministry there. Everything seemed crystal clear. There at the Jordan, the Apostle John records that at least Peter and Andrew and perhaps John and his brother James first started to learn from Jesus. They were excited. This is the Messiah!

But then things started to get unclear. John the Baptist is thrown into prison. Rather than stand up to the forces of evil, Jesus seems to scurry for cover in Galilee. And then not even his relatives accept him so he moves his base of operations to Capernaum.

Is this the person to follow? A coward? Someone rejected by his family?

Life must have gotten very unclear for Peter, Andrew, James and John. They go back to fishing.

But this was what God had foretold. The prophet Isaiah, 700 years earlier, had announced:

*<sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,  
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles—*

*<sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.”*

Galilee was a place of darkness. Always had been. Seemed like it always would be.

Galilee was the northern area of the nation of Israel. It was on a major trade route called “the way of the sea.” So when enemy armies invaded, Galilee always got the worst of it. They lived in the shadow of death.

Jesus went into that place of darkness, not because he was afraid, not because he was scurrying for cover, but because that is where the need was the greatest.

If we are to follow Jesus, we too need to step into the place of darkness. I’m not talking about any place of physical darkness. I’m talking about a place of spiritual darkness. If we are going to follow Jesus we have to step into the spiritually darkest place that I know, our own sinful hearts.

That becomes evident when you look at the other places in the Gospel where Jesus said, “Follow me.”

<sup>19</sup> Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

<sup>20</sup> Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

<sup>21</sup> Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:18-22).

Follow me! It wasn’t a call to become a Twitter follower. It was a call to leave all behind.

Elsewhere Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

Deny yourself. Say no to yourself. What is Jesus talking about? He is saying, “Follow me into this place of unclarity. All the things that you thought you wanted? I want you to start seeing them differently. I want you to say ‘no’ to your natural tendencies and desires that come your sinful heart.”

The last time that Jesus said, “Follow me” really puts some flesh and bones to this command. A rich young man comes to Jesus and says, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus pointed him to the commandments.

“All things I have kept. What do I still lack?” the man asked.

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

The man went away said. He was wealthy. Jesus was asking too much.

And yet, that is the call that Jesus gives over and over again. To follow him means to love him above all things. To follow him means to take the walk this rich young man wasn't willing to do, to look at everything we have, all our possessions, the money in our bank accounts, the cars, the homes, our 401K's and our retirement accounts, and say, “Lord, they are all yours. Just let me know how you want me to use them.”

Wow! That is a dark place isn't it? If we really think about that, it challenges us. Do I really want to follow Jesus exclusively? Can't it be like Twitter and Instagram? You can follow lots of people at the same time. But Jesus' call is exclusive. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount he said, “You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

Follow me. Follow me into this darkness. Follow me into this unclarity, where you stop seeing yourself like Brandon did, a husband who was basically doing everything right, and instead see yourself as the sinner you are.

Jesus' message was the same as John the Baptist's:

*17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

To follow Jesus, first we have to get down on our knees in repentance. I may have felt that I had my life all together, that I was a pretty good guy, but when I see what you expect from me, I have to step into the darkness of sin and guilt. Lord, I am sorry.

But the good news is that the kingdom of heaven is near. In fact, it has come to you. In Romans 14:17 the Apostle Paul describes the kingdom of God.

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).*

In Romans 14, people were thinking that the kingdom of God was all about following rules like what day to go to church on and what you should eat and what you should wear.

No!!!! The Kingdom of God is all about righteousness.

How can I be righteous before God? How can I have a right to stand before a holy God?

The kingdom of God is all about forgiveness isn't it? It is to come and admit our sin and claim the promise of God that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken away our sin.

The kingdom of God is all about peace. God is at peace with me. And I want to share that peace. That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." It is a call to share the peace of forgiveness with others just as God has given it to you.

The kingdom of God is all about joy. It doesn't mean that everything is going to go easy, but in the kingdom of God we have...

- the joy of knowing that nothing can separate you from God's love.
- the joy of knowing that God is in control of our nation, of our church, of my personal life.
- the joy of knowing that God has an eternal plan for me and that I'm going to enjoy being with him forever.

We step into the darkness of Galilee, the darkness of unclarity, the darkness of humble confession of sin, so that we can follow Jesus into this light of righteousness, peace and joy.

And when we have done that, the invitation of our Savior is incredible! Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

*<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.*

*<sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

Wow I love this! This is your purpose and my purpose. We get to fish for men. We get to help people who live in that darkness of uncertainty and fear and death and draw them into the light of righteousness, peace and joy!

How did it happen that Brandon was caught by Christ? He said it! "Thank God for a praying wife." Could I suggest that we start our fishing expedition while we are here on our knees? Pray for the people around you who don't know Christ, family members and friends.

Let's pause for a moment... Do you believe that God hears your prayers? Then let's pray with confidence that he will hear and answer.

On the outline I also suggest that we fish in the boat. When I think about our church, I see an ark. Why do we want to draw people into the boat? Why do we want to draw people into the church? Is it just because we want the church larger? People can accuse us of that. Pride is present in all our hearts. But the real issue is ... here is the ark that God has commanded us to build today.

Here is the ark where the flood waters of eternal death cannot reach. The doors to the ark haven't been closed yet. So we fish and we fish and we fish... using every tool that God gives us...

Don't you see these fishing rods to catch different fish:

Why are we involved in the community? To catch fish.

Why do we want to fill and expand our school: To catch fish

Why do we want to start daughter congregations? To catch fish

Why do we invite the community to our campus? To catch fish.

And here, in the ark, we are fed and kept alive. Baptism, the Lord's Supper. The Word.

But don't just fish here. Our mission statement makes every place a fishing hole for you: *By every possible means we bring every person within our area of influence closer to Christ.*

Everything you do... are you casting?

One last thing. The location of Jesus' ministry is interesting.

*<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.*

The text specifically mentions Syria. There are few places darker than Syria right now. It is symbolic of the death and the destruction, the darkness of the human heart. It is a place that gospel needs to be proclaimed. Pray for the Christians who are there.

But it makes me ask: Where is the darkness that Jesus is calling you to? Will you follow Jesus into the darkness? I appreciate what Brandon said at the end of the video. He was trying to help others who were in the same darkness as he was, setting up a foundation to help those with mental illness.

What about you? What darkness has God drawn you out of? Rejoice in the light for righteousness, peace and joy. And then consider... How can I step into a place of darkness to help others? Your experiences are unique. That's what AA is all about. That is what our Grief Support and Cancer Support groups are all about. What in your experience is making you just the fishing rod that God could use to go fishing for people who are in the darkness. Don't know? That's ok. Pray for clarity. Amen.