

FOLLOWING JESUS

Matthew 4:12-25

The “no look” pass has become such a part of modern basketball, that they will show highlights of that as readily as of hard slamming dunks or three-point shots from the half line. Besides having remarkable sight, players have to be able to do it at the blink of an eye—instantly, without thinking. They do it “immediately.”

That may be great for the basketball court, the football field, or for hitting home runs, but is that what we would do with choices that could affect the rest of our lives? Especially as a place like “Iowa State University of Science and Technology,” where there are a lot of engineering students, it doesn’t make sense to do things “immediately”, but to think things over and rule out all the other possibilities before making a decision. That doesn’t seem right for a decision like “Should I marry this person?”, “Should I stick with this major?”, “Should I take this job offer?”, “Should I invest with this company?”, or “Should I take these treatments or not?”

Yet, “immediately” is the word used to describe what Peter and Andrew and later John and James did when Jesus called them by the Sea of Galilee. The word “immediately” is a favored adverb used by Mark in his Gospel. He seems to want to convey Jesus as a man of action. But “immediately” here is what we find in Matthew’s Gospel. He is emphasizing the quick, unhesitating reaction of these men to Jesus. Jesus told them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” “Immediately”, right away, at once they dropped what they were doing and followed. It even says that John and James did that before the eyes of their father, this in a culture that demanded total respect to their fathers, leaving father Zebedee behind with the nets and the work to follow Jesus. “Immediately!”

The comparison for us is to put ourselves in the shoes of Peter, Andrew, James, and John and ask, “Would we have dropped our nets to follow Jesus?” And not only that—to do it “immediately”?

Imagine leaving your studies behind, after paying for the tuition and maybe receiving scholarship funds, following a man who travels from place to place

talking to crowds, and living off the funds given to you by a group of women? (Luke's Gospel tells us that is what Jesus and the disciples did). Or what about leaving behind your job and family? Or your home and wife? Doesn't all that contradict what we are told in church about being good students, reliable workers, involved parents, and faithful spouses? Yet, we are told that the call of Jesus is one to make an immediate choice—follow Him or reject Him. Go the way that leads to eternal life or the way that focuses on the things of this world. Fish for men, or fish for the world. Again, would we make the choice the disciples did? And do it “immediately?”

But does Jesus walk up to us while in the middle of our studies or work and tell us to drop everything to follow Him? The call to His disciples has parallels to the call we receive Jesus' call, but it is not the same thing. They were called for the specific mission of being one of the 12 disciples. Jesus had 12 disciples because that matched the number of the tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. He was making a “new Israel” based not on their physical descent, but a spiritual one where the offspring would not be physical children, but spiritual ones who share not the disciple's genes, but their faith. And they were specifically called to follow Jesus in the way they were, going from town to town and assisting Jesus in His ministry.

Other people were called to follow Jesus, but in other ways. Later in Matthew's Gospel Jesus heals a man filled with so many demons that he is called “Legion.” After he is freed from that, he wants to follow Jesus from place to place. But Jesus tells him to stay where he was and tell people about Jesus there. When Jesus heals the servant of the Roman centurion, He does not have the centurion leave the Roman army, but to serve in it as a follower of Jesus. He tells the woman was to be stoned for adultery, “Go, and sin no more.” He was then a follower of Jesus, but she was by going on her way freed from that life of adultery. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that the resurrected Jesus was seen at once by more than 500 believers, during the 40 days between Easter and Ascension. But most of them followed Jesus right where they were—in the same place, family, and work situation that they were in when they encountered Jesus.

That includes us today. We pray for people like the former Iowa State students Carl Hanson in Korea and Jon Clausing in Tanzania, for Carl and Kelsey Grulke in

Botswana, who led our youth group, and for the birthdays of those who serve as missionaries in other countries. We pray each week for our sister congregations in our district who are shepherded by pastors who follow Jesus by serving in that way. But just as with the early disciples, most today are called to follow Jesus right where they are. The basic call we all have received, whether we go overseas as a missionary, go to seminary to train to be a pastor, volunteer to do a mission trip, or just stay right where we are, is the call to follow Jesus. Some are called in addition to that, to do something specific like a professional church worker, but only some. That call doesn't make them any better than any other Christian. It is just how Christ works in His Church. Paul says in Ephesians 4, "So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." These specifically called people are not to do the work themselves, but to guide the people, the whole Church, in doing the work.

We see that in how our missionaries work. They do not go into other countries and cultures and preach in the streets to start worshipping communities. They teach local missionaries and evangelists who go into the communities who know the language and culture. They are supported by the efforts of existing congregations and the people in them who provide services like schools, clothing, medical assistance, and caring for the elderly which draw people to the missions. Where the "rubber really hits the road" is in how the people care for others.

That is what we see here. You ask a first-time visitor why he or she is here. They will speak of someone inviting them or telling them about us. Or they will be with that person who has already come to worship with us. People coming to our international classes and activities have heard about us from other internationals. As we follow Jesus, what do we do? We follow His commands to love other people. And as we get involved in other peoples' lives, they learn about what makes us the way we are—our Savior, Christ Jesus. That happens in faraway lands, in other places in our country, and right here among us as we follow Christ.