

Matthew 4:12-23

12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

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

18As he walked 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. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON-

Confession time...I've not really understood why Simon, Andrew, James and John packed in their day jobs to follow Jesus. What was so compelling about Jesus saying he'd make them fish for people? To my ears, Jesus turn of phrase sounded like a slogan, which cues up in my noggin a little Sunday School ditty complete with making motions of reeling in fish. (*are you really gonna make me sing it?*)

Two keys open some doors for me and I hope you'll find them useful too.

First in a broad sense we can ask what these four people were moving FROM and what they're moving TOWARD. That's a helpful concept, I've found. Pastor Doug Reble asked a group of us who were new to our calls about what we were moving FROM and what we were moving TOWARD. His question generated some honest soul searching and earnest conversation.

The second key is specific—it's the very real possibility the disciples had enough of the system under which they fished. Thinking about that leads me to conclude that Peter, Andrew and James, John felt pushed out of their old lives as much as they felt drawn in by the prospect of a new life.

In a very real sense, Jesus calls on these four individuals to choose sides. Here's where I draw extensively from a commentary by Professor Jillian Engelhardt from Texas Christian University that she contributes to *Working Preacher*

How is this choosing an allegiance, you ask? Dr. Engelhardt cites Warren Carter's commentary Matthew on the Margins. I name drop that one because I use his commentary extensively as I prepare sermons from Matthew's Gospel.

“Carter notes that these sets of brothers were likely under contract with the Roman Empire. “As brothers, and possibly members of a cooperative with James and John (4:21), they have purchased a lease or contract with Rome’s agents that allows them to fish and obligates them to supply a certain quality of fish.”² Their actions in following Jesus were a disruption, even if small, to Rome’s economic interests.”

It's plausible the brothers were sick and tired of being a pawn in the Roman Empire's expansion game. Quiet quitting, perhaps?

Whether quiet quitting is truly ‘a thing’ is up for debate. What’s clear is that many people ask ‘who am I working for, anyway?’ One of my relatives tells me that sixty percent of his recent pay cheques goes to taxes. He’s wondering who benefits from the health risks and the sweat that go into his job.

There’s a very good chance the CEO at the company where he works has already raked in more cash on his first day back in January than my relative will all year.

Sarah Anderson directs the Global Economy Project of the Institute for Policy Studies, and is a co-editor of Inequality.org. Her findings illustrate how modern economic empires work.

Ms Anderson found gaping disparities for various types of essential workers. She calculates an average S&P 500 CEO pay of **\$18.3 million** in 2021 (the most recent figure available), which works out to \$8,798 per hour, or \$147 per minute.

Then she reports the fast food workers who often toiled straight through the holidays. Most McDonald's restaurants were open even on Christmas Day. Average pay for this labor force is just \$26,060 for the whole year.

A typical CEO banked that by noon on his first day back in the corner office suite.

The difference between the U.S. and Canada in such disparity is in degree and not in kind. Most, except shareholders and CEO's, tire of this way of living. A similar dynamic would Simon, Andrew, and for James and John to move away from the life they were leading.

Jesus invites them into a different sort of life. Professor Englehardt phrases this so eloquently, you will want to hear a direct quotation.

By choosing Jesus, the brothers choose God's rule over Rome.

They choose to “fish” their land and the people in it for God’s purposes rather than exploiting it for Rome’s gain.

They choose to join Jesus’ ministry in the Promised Land rather than to align themselves with the interests of the occupiers.

Rome wanted the men to catch fish to advance their imperialist expansion. Jesus wants them to catch people for God’s rule, which as Jesus will demonstrate throughout the rest of the Gospel, is a rule of mercy and justice and plenty. (Working Preacher January 22, 2023).

Matthew’s Gospel casts a vision of a people living on the edges of society and living in direct contrast. Matthew offers us a glimpse at God embodied in Jesus...In words we’ve called the beatitudes, Jesus speaks about God remembering the poor and blessing them, God paying special attention to the meek, those who grieve the way things are, those who show mercy and wage peace...and God brings solace even to those who are ridiculed and punished for living in just and merciful ways.

The Good News disrupts even as it consoles. For some, like Herod and the emperors the Good News is threatening. For others, they are renamed, like Simon, now called Peter. Their jobs change. Their lives change. These disruptions are like little shock waves as God disrupts the life taking and life negating forces and continues to repair all that’s broken.