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Title: Getting Ready
Date: January 21 &22, 2017
Preaching: Senior Minister Randy Spleth
Scripture: [Isaiah 9:1-4](#)
Text: [Matthew 4:12-23](#)
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This has been a week of people getting ready. All eyes were on Washington as the city rushed around getting ready for the million visitors attending the inauguration of President Trump. There is a lot of getting ready that takes place to pull that event off, from security to setting up chairs to cleaning up the mess. Did you read that getting the

White House ready for a new president takes just five hours? That's not very long for a move out and move in.

Committees are getting a cabinet ready to take over. It's taken an enormous amount of time and unfortunately, not everyone is yet in place. They are still getting ready to serve. Washington isn't the only place that is getting ready.

Football teams are getting ready and unfortunately, one team doesn't wear the Horseshoe. This afternoon, the Packers and Falcons, Steelers and Patriots are getting ready for conference championship. Fans are getting ready to watch this afternoon and once the games are over, two teams will start getting ready all over again, getting ready for the Super Bowl.

The disciples and Jesus are getting ready. That's the story for today. You might not understand it this way. It is a familiar passage and sometimes, when we know a story well, we miss new insight. Many of you know it by heart. Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee, sees a couple of fishermen and says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4: 19b KJV) That's how I learned it when I memorized it in Sunday School. Actually, my memory verse went, "And he saith unto them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" (Matthew 4:19 KJV) We don't "saith unto" any longer and we have learned to talk about men and women so the modern version reads, "And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." (Matthew 4:19 NRSV) Fish for people is more inclusive but the

metaphor sounds strange to folk in the 21st century who don't make a living casting nets. Context is everything and it is important in this lesson.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. Matthew isn't clear about where along the Jordan River that John was baptizing but it was likely closer to the Dead Sea because he says, people were coming from Jerusalem and all Judea. Judea is the area around the Dead Sea and Jerusalem. But our lesson today begins, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee." (Matthew 3:12) It is an abrupt and startling way to tell a story. The word for arrested literally means "handed over." This phrase will be repeatedly used to describe Jesus' own deliverance into the hands of his enemies. (Matthew 17:22, 20:18, 26:2) The announcement implies that as John goes, so will Jesus. Jesus is getting ready to be handed over. ¹

Perhaps out of fear for his safety, Jesus goes home, withdraws to Galilee some 70 miles from the Dead Sea area. But he leaves his home and settles in Capernaum, north of the Sea of Galilee. This is where Jesus starts getting ready for his life ahead of him. This is what he is doing. The more you study the life of Jesus, the more you realize that Jesus had many roles. Jesus is healer and miracle worker, prophet and teacher. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and the risen Savior who conquers the grave. But Jesus is really none of those things at this moment in the gospel of Matthew. Rather, he is just getting ready to be all of these things. He is getting ready to start a spiritual, social movement, a new age where the reign of God is at hand, one prophesized for centuries. We know that prophesy almost as well as we know our story today. Matthew makes reference to it. He says "...the 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." (Matthew 4:16)

Does that passage sound familiar? It should. A few days short of a month ago, we read it on Christmas Eve. Do you remember? Matthew is quoting Isaiah 9, a famous Christmas Eve passage. Isaiah goes on to describe the light this way: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) You know that passage but I bet you didn't connect it with Jesus calling his disciples. But this is what Matthew says Jesus is doing. Jesus is getting ready to be all of these things, to begin his ministry, to help people understand that the kingdom of heaven is near.

There are two ways that Jesus gets ready. The first is apparent. He calls people out to follow him. He's asking individuals, like Andrew and Peter,

James and John, to follow him and they do. They drop their nets and follow immediately. With our modern perspective about jobs and responsibilities, it is hard to understand. We'd worry about an itinerant minister, walking into Subway or McDonalds and saying to one of our sons or daughters, "Follow me and you will serve spiritually hungry people." None here wants their kids to drop a Big Mac, jump over the counter and take off with a strange preacher. That's how we read it. They just drop their nets and follow a stranger. Again, what's missing in our understanding is context and also, timing.

The context is this. In first century Palestine there were lots of itinerant rabbi's wandering through Judea and Galilee. Their teaching and positions were as varied as the republican and democratic presidential candidates that we heard over the last year. And just like those candidates, the rabbis recruited support, people who became disciples of a particular rabbi. John the Baptist was one of those rabbis who had followers. So instead of a father or mother being concerned, most of the time they were happy. Their sons were associating with a spiritual leader and they were still around, maybe even still at home. Parents saw their children because these rabbis' taught in a very small geographical area. Likely they continued working the job. Certainly this would be the case for fishermen whose trade was largely late night early morning schedule. We misunderstand this context.

We also miss the timing element. Because we know the end of the story, because there is such a quick turnaround on our calendar between the birth of Jesus and his passion in Jerusalem, we read this story and have those fishermen drop their nets, wave goodbye and be half way to Jerusalem while daddy Zebedee is still sitting in his fishing boat. That's not what happened. Jesus spends a considerable amount of time, probably most of three years, preaching in the fishing villages along the Sea of Galilee. He was building momentum, getting ready to be our Savior. It is why Matthew says, "Jesus 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." (Matthew 4:23) In Galilee, Jesus is getting ready to journey to Jerusalem. Transforming people's lives, getting them on board with a new way of thinking and believing, takes time. It doesn't happen instantly or overnight. It takes long term commitment. Following Jesus is a lifetime experience of getting ready.

This is what the disciples learn. They spent three years with Jesus around the Sea of Galilee. We have story after story of the disciples following Jesus. Not one of these stories, in any of the gospels, talk about the disciples catching one person. Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" and then, for the next three years, doesn't mention it again. Not a

word is said, until the last word. As Jesus is ascending into heaven, he turns to his disciples and says, "Go Fish!" That's how I see it. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28: 19-20b) Here is how I interpret that. He turns to them and said, "You know that fishing metaphor I used, the one about fishing for people? The last three years, you've been getting ready to fish. Now go do it." I know that's not exactly the way it's written in the gospel but with all my heart, I believe that is exactly what Jesus was saying.

But what is the passage saying to us, to you and to me? It is saying a lot of things but I want you to hold on to just one. Following Jesus is a lifetime of getting ready. That's what this story points to and what the gospels reveal. Jesus is getting ready and his disciples are getting ready too. They were getting ready to go to Jerusalem. They were getting ready to experience the death and resurrection of Jesus. But they were also getting ready to fish for people, getting ready to be filled by the Holy Spirit and getting ready launch the church. Throughout their entire lives of following Jesus, they are getting ready until, they finally get ready to meet Jesus in eternity which is ultimately what we are all getting ready for.

Which brings us to your question. Ask yourself this question, "What is Jesus getting me ready for? What's the next thing to come? What is God preparing me for? Whatever stage you are in your life, something is coming. Sometimes it things like a marriage, or children or grandchildren. It can be challenges like losing a job or facing retirement. It might be dealing with a health crisis or giving up a loved one to death. It's even things like witnessing to a neighbor or working on a mission trip. Our life with Jesus is about getting ready. And the question always comes, whatever you face, will you be ready? Have you prepared yourself spiritually for whatever is ahead?

Following Jesus is a lifetime commitment of continuous preparation. You can't let up. You can't get lazy because you are always getting ready for something and you don't always know what or when it is coming. This is the story of the disciples and it is our story as well.

Let me leave you with a little story that might help you think about getting ready.

The Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno tells of an ancient Roman aqueduct, located near the city of Segovia. The aqueduct — a sort of elevated bridge over which water flows — was constructed in the year A.D. 109. For 1,800 years, the aqueduct carried cool water from the mountains to the hot and

thirsty city. As many as 60 generations depended on this marvel of engineering for their drinking water.

Then came another generation, in more recent years, who said to each other, "This aqueduct is an architectural marvel. It's a historical treasure that ought to be preserved. We should give it a well-earned rest."

That's exactly what they did. They detoured the water flow away from the ancient stones and channeled it through modern pipes. They put up historical markers so tourists would know who had constructed the aqueduct, and for what purpose. They celebrated the fact that their city's water system was now modern in every way.

But then, a strange thing began to happen. The Roman aqueduct began to fall apart. The sun beating down on its dry mortar, without the constant flow of water to cool it, caused it to crumble. In time, the massive structural stones threatened to fall. What 18 centuries of hard service had not been able to destroy, a few years of idleness nearly did.²

I want you to take that image with you as you leave here today. Following Jesus is getting ready for life, for the life ahead of us whatever it brings. We can't let up. We can't shut off the life giving flow of the Spirit, even for a moment, a week or two, a month or year. Because if we do, when we need our faith most, it won't be there and we won't be ready. That's what following Jesus is about. It's about getting ready. Let me pray with you so that you'll recommit yourself today to getting ready.

Lord Jesus, when we become so preoccupied in the busyness of our life, so distracted with casting our daily nets, that sometimes our ability to follow you slips. Help us today to hear your voice again, hear you call to follow so that whatever comes, whenever it comes, we'll be ready. Amen.

¹ Donald Senior, *Matthew*, The Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pg 61-66.

²

Las Vegas Lazy, Jan 27, 2008, retrieved by subscription a @ https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040359