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Title: Getting Ready

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Scripture: [Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

Text: [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

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We got someone else's food. Well, that's not completely true. Door Dash tried to deliver someone else's food to us. Lori and I were minding our business, doing the work on the church late Wednesday afternoon when a guy walked in the office, a bag in one hand and a cola in the other, claiming that he was supposed to leave the food at the front desk for Michele. We were the only people in the building, it was way past lunch, closer to dinner actually and neither of us is named Michele. So, we told him, "You are calling on the wrong place and wrong people. No one here is named Michele." Initially, he didn't believe us. Then he said his phone was in the car. He said he'd go check the call. And that was the last we saw of him.

Someone experienced with these services might have an explanation. It may be a common experience to have a delivery go to the wrong place. But Lori and I are clueless because when it comes to using Door Dash or GrubHub, or UberEats, we aren't early adopters. We aren't ready for it. We're not even getting ready for it.

Our story today is about the early adopters, about those that were ready for Jesus. One could argue that they had been getting ready for some time. Matthew makes that point. You might have missed it because the call of the disciples is the headliner in the passage I just read. It's so familiar that you zone in on it and zip right past Matthew's reminder that all the events in this story are part of God's redemptive activity. They describe something they have been getting ready for a long while.

Let me point it out to you by reminding you that Matthew is writing to a Jewish Christian audience. It's his niche among the four Gospels and he knows that his readers know scripture. He's constantly quoting the Old Testament. He begins by quoting the 9th chapter of Isaiah, reminding them that they have been getting ready for a long time. As soon as they heard, "land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali" it tipped them off. Zebulun and Naphtali are two of Jacob's sons, two of the 12 tribes of Israel. When the promised land was carved up and pieces handed out, Naphtali got a big piece of real estate on the western side of the Sea of Galilee as far north as modern-day Jordan. Zebulun not so

much. Just a small piece of land southwest of Zebulun, but still considered Galilee.

God says to the prophet Isaiah, "Tell them to get ready. Tell them to be prepared because of these "... people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2) Does that passage sound familiar? It should. Just a few weeks ago on Christmas Eve, we read it. 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)

Now, you are nodding. You know that passage, but I bet you didn't connect it with Jesus getting ready to start his ministry or for that matter, Jesus calling his first disciples.

Matthew is telling the story in such a way that everyone understands who Jesus is and more importantly, that they remember they've been getting ready for him for centuries. He's the Prince of peace promised to show up in Galilee. He's the promised light, come to shine in the darkness. This is why Jesus announced, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Something new, exciting, and promising is about to happen. God is about to put a new possibility before you and you've been getting ready for a long time.

But it's not just about God's people; Jesus is Jesus getting ready. He's getting ready to fulfill his mission on earth and he is doing so two different ways. The first is pretty 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 him. With our modern perspective about jobs and responsibilities, it is hard to understand. We'd worry about an itinerant minister, walking into Subway and saying to one of our sons or daughters, "Follow me and you will serve food to spiritually hunger of people."

No one here wants their kids to drop a sandwich, jump over the counter and take off with a strange preacher. That's how we hear it. They just drop their nets and follow a stranger, to fish for people. Again, what's missing in our understanding is context and also, timing.

In the first century Palestine, there were lots of itinerant rabbi's wandering through Judea and Galilee. They were more the norm than the exception. There were hundreds of rabbis circulating in the land of

Israel in Jesus' day. John the Baptist was one. The rabbi's stay in the community might last from only a few days to weeks or even months. If one wanted to learn from a rabbi, one had to "follow after him."¹

When Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, enlisting disciples with the call, "Come, follow me." (Matthew 4:19) "Follow me," in Greek, is literally, "walk after me." It is a technical term for becoming an apprentice, a disciple. The call to discipleship sometimes necessitated heartrending decisions, a call to leave home. But on other occasions, they were still around because the itinerant rabbi traveled in a fairly small geographical area. That's reflected in this passage when we hear that Jesus makes his home in Capernaum. Capernaum is the home of Peter and Andrew and likely all of the disciples lived in the home when not traveling. This may suggest that these four fishermen were still able to fish, while they were following Jesus because Jesus didn't spend a few days, week or even months, he spent years.

Jesus spent three years preaching in the fishing villages along the Sea of Galilee. He was building momentum. It is why that 23rd verse is so important to understand this passage. "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) Hear what is going on. Jesus is getting ready for his destiny in Jerusalem. He is discipling, transforming people's lives, getting them on board with a new way of thinking and believing. It takes time. It doesn't happen instantly or overnight. It takes long term commitment. In a very real way, following Jesus is a lifetime of **getting ready**.

This is what the disciples learned. 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, talks about the disciples catching one person. Not one talked about fishing for men. Why? I guess they weren't ready. I think that's interesting. I think it is even more interesting that Jesus doesn't mention it again until he 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) I know that's not exactly the way it's written in the gospel but I believe that is exactly what he was saying. The reason is this.

Their call, our call, any call is less about what you do and more about what you become. Let me say that again. A call is less about what we do and more about who we are. God's call isn't simply to *do* something, but rather to *be* something, to be a child of God, to be a follower, to be a disciple. Being comes before doing. Being even makes doing possible.²

We study this story because it reveals that Jesus is getting ready and his disciples are getting ready too. They were getting ready to go to his destiny in Jerusalem. They were getting ready to experience Holy Week where both Jesus and they will be put to trial. They are getting ready to experience Jesus' death on the cross. And then, they were getting ready for Easter and getting ready to watch Jesus ascend into heaven. They have to do all of this before they can make disciples.

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. ***Following Jesus is a lifetime of getting ready.***

This leads to a personal question. "What is Jesus getting me ready for? What's the next thing to come? What is God preparing me? Whatever stage you are in your life, something is coming. It's things like a marriage, and babies and grandchildren. It's challenges like losing a job or facing cancer 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?

It reminds us that 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 and you don't always know what or when it was 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 trestle 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.³

I want you to take that image with you as you leave here today. ***Following Jesus is a lifetime of getting ready.*** But we are also 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's following Jesus is about. It's about getting ready. That food for thought has been delivered not by DoorDash but Jesus. I hope you'll take it because it has your name on it.

¹ <https://www.biblescholars.org/2013/05/study-shows-jesus-as-rabbi.html>

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/01/epiphany-3-a-being-before-doing/>

³ http://www.homiletics.net/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040359