

For some of you Mexia has been home for as long as you can remember. You have lived in Mexia your whole life and if you have left Mexia it has only been for a short while. This is your home. You were born here and you will die here. I was talking with an older man the other day and I asked him, "Have you lived here in Mexia your whole life?" He replied, "No, I lived in Shiloh when I was younger." To me and my way of thinking he has lived in Mexia his whole life! Others of you were not born here but you have lived here most of your life. Perhaps your family moved here when you were a child and you have made this place your home ever since. Others of you may have lived in a lot of different places over the course of your life.

I have lived in Baton Rouge, LA, New Roads, LA, New Orleans, LA, Dallas, Arlington, Nacogdoches, back to Arlington, Grapevine, North Richland Hills, Dawson, and now Mexia. There are pros and cons to living in one place your whole life, and there are pros and cons to moving to different places. In a lot of ways I envy those of you who have had the opportunity to develop lasting relationships in one community. I think it's neat that you still know people you went to high school with and when someone mentions a family name you not only know the name but can tell all about that family and then some! That can be good and bad at the same time! On the other hand, I see the blessings in moving from place to place. While it is difficult to adjust at times, it's really neat to meet new people and develop new friendships.

Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth for most of his life. He was the kid from Nazareth. He knew where to go for a good barbecue sandwich in Nazareth. He knew which barber to go to. He knew that the guy who owned the general store in town would give him free ice cream if he would volunteer to sweep the floor from time to time. Jesus had friends in Nazareth. He played in the Nazareth baseball league with his friends and even made the All-Star team one year. He played the tuba in the marching band and was invited to march in the parade during Nazareth's annual Olive Festival. He not only had friends in Nazareth but family as well. He worked with his father and brothers and sisters and grew up like most any other kid in Nazareth.

In our story today from Matthew we read that John the Baptist had been arrested and as a result of John's arrest, Jesus withdrew to Galilee. Matthew put it this way, "He withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and

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made his home in Capernaum by the sea.” That might sound like an innocent enough statement but do you realize what that meant for Jesus and his family and friends? Jesus was leaving and was not coming back. No more lazy afternoons at the general store nibbling on an ice cream cone. No more baseball games at the park. No more parades. No more running into friends at the post office and chatting about the day’s events. Jesus was leaving.

He decided to go to Galilee. Galilee was a densely populated area where the great roads of the world passed through. It has been said that Judea was on the way to nowhere, and that Galilee was on the way to everywhere. The name Galilee comes from the Hebrew word galil which means a circle. Galilee was literally surrounded by Gentiles. So when Jesus withdrew from Nazareth he was not withdrawing from society, but throwing himself in the midst of a wide variety of people. Josephus, who was once governor of the province of Galilee, wrote: “It is throughout rich in soil...and inviting by its productiveness even those who have the least inclination for agriculture. It is everywhere tilled; no part is allowed to be idle, and everywhere it is productive.” At the time of Jesus there were 204 villages in the Galilean region. And get this – every village had a population of at least 15,000 people. Jesus was moving to the big city! It may not have been New York and Broadway, but it was close enough for a guy from Nazareth.

When Jesus arrived in Capernaum he began to preach the message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” In other words, all that the people had been waiting for in a Messiah was present and among them. The kingdom of heaven was at hand in the person of Jesus Christ. Wow! The time had arrived at last. Jesus was beginning his ministry full force. So it makes me wonder, why on earth would he call people to follow him and help him in his ministry? Why would he feel compelled to call disciples to work with him in his ministry? It seems to me that Jesus could have managed just fine on his own. Why go to the trouble of calling regular, everyday people like Andrew and Peter? For some reason God has chosen us as his disciples and wants to work with us in ministry. Could God do it better on his own without us messing things up along the way? Of course, but God chose to call us not for his sake, but for our sake.

Andrew and Peter were fishing that day. They, like so many in that region, made a living through the fishing industry. Andrew and Peter were casting their nets into the lake when Jesus came up and interrupted them.

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Now keep in mind that this was their work. They were not fishing like we would think of fishing – sitting under a shade tree with a cane pole and a cold drink relaxing. They were working. Jesus just barged right in the middle of their workday. Forget the fact that they had a 10:00 a.m. conference call with the folks at the corporate office in New York. Forget that they were working on that report that was due yesterday. Forget that the new computer network was giving them trouble, Jesus didn't really care what they were doing because he knew what they would be doing once he called them. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

In Matthew's gospel there is no indication that either Andrew or Peter even knew Jesus at the time. For all we know this was their first encounter with Jesus. So that makes it all the more surprising when Andrew and Peter immediately left their nets and followed him. Matthew wrote, "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." You would think that one, if not both of them, would have asked Jesus some questions. Questions like, "Do you match in the 401K? Do you provide health insurance and if so, is my family included? What is the vacation policy? Do we get two weeks immediately or do we have to work with you for a year or more? Will there be a company camel or do we have to provide our own transportation? Andrew and Peter didn't ask any of those questions. They didn't even ask him where they were going. They just knew that the one they met on the shoreline was real and worth following. They literally gave up everything to follow him.

But Jesus wasn't finished calling disciples. He saw two brothers sitting in a boat with their father mending their nets. They were working too. Mending nets was part of the job. The brothers were James and John – the sons of Zebedee. (In Fort Worth we had a praise band and two of the guitar players were named James and John. I joked one day that they should take their show on the road and call themselves "The Sons of Zebedee".) Jesus called James and John to follow and they immediately left their nets and boat and more significantly, their father. Again, Matthew stresses the immediacy of their discipleship. No thinking about it or asking questions or running the idea by their father.

I wonder what Zebedee thought about the whole thing? Matthew doesn't say anything about his reaction. If I were Zebedee I would have said something like this: "Wait a minute boys! What do you think you are doing? We have nets to mend and fish to catch. This family has fished for generations. It's what we do. You can't leave. Besides that you are my sons and I don't want you going off with this stranger." But they went

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anyway. I think it's important that these followers of Jesus were real human beings with real relationships and attachments, and that following Jesus meant giving up something or someone else.

Jesus has a funny way of calling us into discipleship. You know Andrew and Peter didn't go to work that day thinking to themselves, "Today the Son of God is going to ask us to follow him." James and John were not sitting in the boat thinking, "I wonder what it would be like to meet the Son of God today?" They were just minding their own business when Jesus called them to follow. If you read throughout the Bible you will see example after example of people being called by God without any inclination of what was coming. Over and over again it is God who initiates the relationship and not us.

It calls to mind that wonderful story in the book of I Samuel. The boy Samuel was under the care of an older priest named Eli. Eli's eyesight was failing him at the time and he was lying down in his room in the middle of the night. Samuel was in another room when the Lord called out to him, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel, thinking it was the voice of Eli, ran to Eli and said, "Here I am! For you called me." Eli said, "I did not call; go back to sleep!" The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up, went back to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Eli, with far more patience than I would have had, said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." The Lord called Samuel again and again Samuel went to Eli. At that point Eli knew that something was up and that the Lord was trying to speak to Samuel. Samuel went back to sleep and the Lord called him again. Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And then it happened – the Lord called Samuel to be a prophet. I'm guessing that wasn't on Samuel's radar screen when he went to bed that night. Samuel, like Andrew, Peter, James, and John after him, was called out of the blue without warning.

In John 15:16 Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." In other words, we have a lot of nerve thinking that we "invite" Jesus into our hearts. To me it sounds the other way around. God is the one doing the inviting through Christ. We simply respond to God's invitation. God's invitation to us was loud and clear through the cross of Christ. It was God's way of saying I choose you and love you even before you can choose me and love me.

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I've already told you about the time our family went to North Park Mall in Dallas over Christmas and how we had to park at the Neiman Marcus entrance. It was quite a scene as we walked through the extravagance! I still can't believe what they charge for the stuff at Neiman's. I mentioned to you before that the boys liked riding the escalator, and how we looked like the Clampants in the Beverly Hillbillies that day at Neiman's. I remember what Andrew said as he watched the escalators going up and down: "The way up and the way down is the same way." What he was saying was, "You ride the escalator to get up and you ride the same escalator to go down." God came to us in Jesus and we come to God in Jesus. The way up and the way down is the same way, and the God who chose to come to us in Jesus calls us just as He called Andrew, Peter, James, and John. Is He calling you today? And if so, what would you leave behind to follow? That's another way of asking, "Is there anything or anyone in your life more important than Jesus? Think about it.