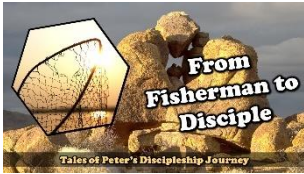


From Fisherman to Disciple



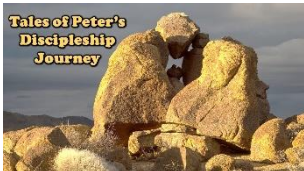
<Matthew 4:18-22>

18 As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen.¹⁹ “Come, follow me.” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.”²⁰ Right away, they left their nets and followed him.
²¹ Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and ²² immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

I like Peter. Of all the disciples, Peter is the one that I can most identify with. Actually, he is the one that the gospels mention the most. He is portrayed in the gospels as being so relatable, so human. He is impulsive. He blurts things out. He bumbles along.

He instantly and confidently drops his fishing nets to follow Jesus, he gets out a boat in the middle of the lake to walk on the water and sinks. Jesus even says to Peter, ‘Get behind me Satan’ and says he is a stumbling block! Peter really doesn’t want Jesus to wash his feet, he falls asleep as Jesus prays, he denies Jesus three times before the cock crows, and runs away from the empty tomb and locks himself away.

And yet, it is Peter that says, ‘You are Messiah’. Jesus calls him ‘The Rock’ and gives him the keys to the Kingdom. Peter goes on to be a great man of strong faith. He becomes a preacher and church planter and eventually the Church recognizes him as a Saint. What a great faith story!



We can laugh at or with Peter. We can see ourselves in his story. We can think about discipleship and what it means. So, we are going to take a look at Peter’s story as a disciple. And compare it to our own, and see where we can draw inspiration and motivation and hope. And maybe even recognize more clearly where God is active in our own lives both in the past and the present in this pandemic, so that we can tell our own human stories, flaws and all, or the Tales of Our Discipleship Journey. Each week’s sermon will stand on its own, but you will be able to catch any you miss, or point your friends to them, on our Ipswich Circuit website (<https://methodistic.org.uk>).

Just one point before we start. Peter was not named Peter when Jesus first called him to be a disciple. His name was **Simon**, or Simon bar Jonah (Simon, son of Jonah). It was later that Jesus gave Simon the name **Peter**, meaning the Rock. I debated how to do this. Do I call him Simon or Simon Peter or Peter? I thought about nicknames. Sue for Susan. Steve for Steven. We use those nicknames when talking about the person in the present or in the past, even for events that occurred long before they adopted the nickname. I thought about our transgender siblings, and how their names often change part way through their lives. When we talk about their past, then we use their new name, not their birth name, regardless of whether the event was before or after they transitioned. So, I am going to refer to Peter all the time as **Peter**, even though some of the events happened when he was known as Simon.

We have just heard Matthew’s gospel story of Jesus’ calling Peter to be a disciple. Mark’s is almost identical. We’ll hear the gospel of Luke’s in a moment. And we’ll return to John’s in a few weeks’ time.

The gospel of Matthew opens with Jesus’ birth story and his escape to Egypt and his return as a young child. Jesus’ ministry starts with John the Baptist baptizing him, and then Jesus is tempted in the

Desert for 40 days. The next few verses of Matthew talk about Jesus beginning his ministry in Galilee, where he proclaims, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” And then comes our passage about Jesus calling the four fishermen.



It is a short passage. Peter, Andrew, James and John are fishing, probably close to the shore as they can hear Jesus. **Jesus calls to them and commands them to Come and Follow him. And immediately they leave their nets and follow him.**

Wow. That is it. We are not given any hints into Peter’s thought process. Peter is a fisherman and he is about to leave his livelihood. We know Peter is married, because later in the gospel, Jesus heals his mother-in-law. Fishermen were not rich. How would this affect his family? Did he already know Jesus, or had he only recently met him?

How impulsive and courageous of Peter. He heard the command and he obeyed. Discipleship is hearing God’s call and obeying it even if it means radical changes in the direction of our life. The danger in our lives and churches is that **we define the mission and then invite Jesus to tag along.** Christian discipleship does not begin with us seeking out Jesus and asking him to participate, but it is **about Jesus’ call on our life and our response.** And as we do so, *we’ll end up in places that we never imagined being, doing things we never imagined ourselves doing, and sharing life, fellowship, service and worship with people that we would never have imagined ourselves interacting with.*¹ **Peter had no idea where Jesus was going to lead him.** Yet he immediately trusted and followed.

While sometimes I can identify with Peter’s impulsivity, I do not like having to make snap decisions over the big things of life. I like to think about it. To look at it from all the angles. To make a mental list of pros and cons. I wonder how many times I’ve got in the way of Jesus saying, *Come, follow me.* Following involves a level of trust, of willingness to walk into the unknown.

Let’s have a listen to Luke’s version of the scripture now and see what else we can glean.

<Luke 5:1-11>

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God’s word. ² Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. ³ Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, “Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon replied, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.”

⁶ So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. ⁷ They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” ⁹ Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. ¹⁰ James and John, Zebedee’s sons, were Simon’s partners and they were amazed too. Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people.” ¹¹ As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus had already began his ministry. He’d already healed Peter’s mother-in-law and done other healings and casted out demons and had preached in the synagogues of Judea. On this

¹ Mark S. Adams, “Matthew 4:18-22 - Pastoral Perspective” in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds., *Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, Volume 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

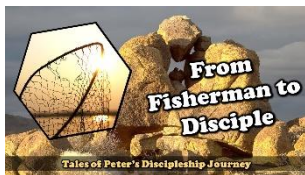
morning, Peter is on the shore cleaning his fishing net after an unsuccessful night's fishing. Jesus, comes by and asks Peter if he can use his boat as a pulpit. So, Peter takes Jesus a little way out in the boat and Jesus taught the crowd that had gathered. Then he tells Peter to go out to the deep water and drop the nets again. Peter is a fisherman! He knows the lake, the best times to fish and the places to go. He points out that he hadn't found any fish all night implying that they would not succeed now. But he humours Jesus, saying: **Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.**"



They catch a miraculous number of fish. Peter realizes that something mystical has happened, and that he is in the presence of the divine. In his awe, Peter realizes how unworthy he is and declares his unfitness for whatever Jesus has in mind. Jesus is not concerned about this and he responds telling Peter, '**Do not be afraid.** From now on you will be catching people.' And Peter and

James and John leave everything go and follow Jesus. Notice Jesus came when they were discouraged. God doesn't wait for everything to be wonderful in our lives. God finds us wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Peter thought he was unfit for the task, but Jesus thought otherwise.

So, from Matthew's gospel, we see Peter listening and obeying with no idea where Jesus was going to lead him. And as we add to it the details from Luke, Jesus met Peter in the midst of Peter's discouragement and calls him anyway, regardless of Peter's thoughts of unworthiness.



And so Peter's journey from Fisherman to Disciple began. **What's your call story?** Maybe you heard a call in church or Sunday School as a child. Maybe you were at a Youth Camp or Outing with your friends. Maybe it was at a rally. Or maybe a friend who invited you to come and see. Maybe it was when you were at rock bottom. Maybe it was dramatic, and you remember it, or maybe it was gradual.

I remember the Christmas Day after I turned six years old waking up after Santa Claus had been. I had been going to church since I was a babe in arms, but that morning, something mystical happened. I don't know what made things drop into place, but I distinctly remember my mum coming into my room, and sharing with her my revelation about Santa. And the revelations kept coming, so we talked about the Tooth Fairy, and then I said with confidence, "but God is real." Perhaps that is where my discipleship journey began, or maybe I was already on that journey. And it has certainly been an adventure! I've met so many people that I would not otherwise have met through the local church, the wider church, conferences and training opportunities, and mission projects. I've come to understand more about advocacy and solidarity. I've tried to practice hospitality and generosity and justice. At times. I've served the hungry, the homeless, the mentally ill, the addicted, the sick and the lonely. And I've preached and spread the Good News! And many of those steps have been faltering steps – some impulsive, some thought-out, and a few courageously. And yet still Jesus keeps calling.

In this time of uncertainty that we are in now, listen for Jesus' voice calling you. While we can't leave our houses, there are still many ways to use our gifts and be disciples of Christ proclaiming the God of justice, compassion, hope and love. *Jesus said, "Come, follow me," and immediately they left their boats and followed him.* For the witness of Peter, his trust and obedience: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Resources

Come, Follow Me. South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. <https://www.umcsc.org/congregational-specialists/come-follow-me/>.

Hamilton, Adam. *Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds. *Feasting on the Gospels.* Luke, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds. *Feasting on the Gospels.* Matthew, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.