



January 27, 2008

Called to Follow

Following in God's way is a journey that calls for choice and brings change. When Jesus calls ordinary fishers to follow, they choose to do so. Paul appeals to the church at Corinth to choose unity in Christ's mission. As the call to follow in God's way unfolds in our lives, such choice is ours each day.

Focus Scripture Matthew 4:12-23

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Open our hearts to trust in you, O God, as we experience the gradual unfolding of your call in our lives. Be our hope and our salvation as we seek to live into your way. Amen.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23

This passage in the gospel of Matthew marks the time that Jesus begins to preach and gather disciples. The arrest of John the Baptizer, noted in verse 12, is a pivotal moment. Upon hearing this news, Jesus withdraws to Galilee. (The Greek verb for *withdraw* here is the same verb that was used to describe Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt with Jesus.)

Jesus settles in Capernaum in Galilee, an area with many Gentiles. This was the ancient land of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. When Jesus withdraws to this area, it is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew points to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, the one of whom Isaiah and John the Baptizer had spoken.

Jesus picks up John's prophetic ministry and makes it his own. Jesus' call to the crowds is to repent, for God's reign is near. This call to repent is a call to change – to turn one's life in a new direction.

Choosing to follow in the way of God was the call of the prophets. It was the heart of John's message before his arrest. Now the call to change directions and journey in God's way becomes Jesus' message. And, it becomes the church's message of good news across all time.

The call of the disciples in verses 18-22 seems abrupt. It may be helpful to note that the writer of Matthew relates significant events in salvation history without necessarily indicating the passage of time. Jesus speaks and the fishers respond. These brothers do not ask, "Where are you going?" They change the direction in their lives and follow.

Within this one passage, all the elements of Jesus' earthly ministry are included: proclaiming the presence of God's reign; teaching, healing, and calling disciples. An indication of the manner in which Jesus ministers can be found here, too. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus responds to violence or threats of violence by withdrawing rather than retaliating,

demonstrating Jesus' leadership in God's reign of righteousness (see also, for example, Matthew 12:15, 14:13). Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's description of God's faithful and peaceful servant. This response is an indication of God's new way, and the way of the church who worships and seeks to follow Jesus.

In the focus scripture, Matthew connects Jesus with the prophetic message of Isaiah as the saving light of God to those living in despair. This saving light of God is celebrated in **Isaiah 9:1-4**. This text speaks of the light of a new king, probably originally referring to a new prince born after 732 BCE, following a time of war. This king was to inaugurate a time of peace and justice. Since the early church, Christians have associated this promise with Jesus, seeing Jesus as the "Prince of Peace" and a king in the Davidic line.

God as light and salvation also is extolled in **Psalms 27:1, 4-9**. The psalmist trusts in God's presence as a refuge in the midst of difficulties. These words might form the prayer of all who respond to the call to do God's work.

In **1 Corinthians 1:10-18** Paul calls the Christians in Corinth to repent – to change direction and be united in outlook. This miracle is possible, Paul believes, because of God's saving grace. Paul calls them to follow in God's way, secure in the knowledge that they belong to Christ. Living into the way of God will change the community of faith.

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In all times, God calls us. This unfolding call becomes our invitation to follow in God's way, extending the good news of the gospel to others. In what ways does the faith community support those who choose to heed Jesus' call to follow?

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Use user name *spirit* and password *linking*.

