

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news^[a] of^[b] God ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[c] repent, and believe in the good news.”^[d]

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

How do we know Simon Peter was a rich fisherman?

Answer: By his net income.

I think it's fair to say throughout our lives when we come to a major decision and the answer may not be clear, that we all look for signs on what to do. We all want clear signals as to what God wants us to do. Sometimes it is clear, but we don't want to follow what God's will is for us.

That's what happened in the story of Jonah. At the beginning of the story, God called him to go to Nineveh and preach against the city which was sinful in the sight of God. But instead, Jonah ran away. He said, no way, God. I'm out of here. So, he goes to the port city of Joppa and pays the fare to get on a boat and sail away.

So what happened to Jonah when he went against God's will? Nothing good. The Lord whipped up a violent wind on the sea and buffeted the ship he was sailing on. The sailors on the boat cast lots to find out who was responsible for the storm. The lot fell on Jonah. Jonah told them to throw him overboard because he knew he was responsible for the storm because he had fled from God. Eventually they did throw him overboard and he plunged into the sea. Fortunately for Jonah, God is merciful and sent a big fish out to save him and the fish swallowed him. Jonah prayed to God in the belly of the fish, saying, I with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make Good. I will say, “Salvation comes from the Lord.” And with that, God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out.

What happens when we don't do God's will? Of course the consequences aren't going to be as bad as what Jonah experienced. But there are consequences when we don't answer God's call. We experience separation from God. There is something that keeps us distant, that tugs at our hearts, when we know deep down, we are not responding to God's call. I think of the story of the Rich Young Man, who wanted to follow Jesus. But when Jesus told him to sell all his belongings and follow him, he couldn't, and he walked away sad. I think that is what happens to us when we do not follow the call of the Lord.

We feel a sadness because we are choosing our own will to God's will. We feel that separation from God, like we have let God down.

Our Old Testament reading today is about when Jonah did God's will when God called him a second time to go to Nineveh and command them to repent and change their ways. The second time he was called, he went.

Then in our New Testament reading, we receive the example of the apostles dropping everything to do what the Lord commands them to do. They leave their jobs and family behind so they can follow the Lord. The story tells us they did not hesitate. They just did it. How often do we do that to God's call? Or what we know is God's will? Do we say, "I'm in. Let's do it" to God's will? Perhaps we should alter our view on God's call to us. Why don't we treat the call of God like an adventure? Why don't we treat God's will as something to be joyful about? Why don't we treat God's will that way, and not reacting with dread?

Diane Baldwin writes in *These Days*, the daily devotional available in the narthex, that in Hebrew culture, followers of a rabbi left everything and followed the rabbi wherever they went. They didn't let anything hold them back; they dropped job, home, family. Baldwin writes, "In other words, followers of the rabbi went *wherever* the rabbi pointed." In our reading from Mark that is what the fishermen did. They were responding to God's call. They were responding to what it seems they knew at that moment was the will of God for their lives.

The call of the Lord doesn't always have to be dramatic. In fact, most of the time, it is not dramatic. God doesn't usually call us to abandon our lives and do something entirely different. Sometimes God does this, but certainly not always. It's about God's will, not ours.

What is God calling us to do? What is God's will for us? Well, to find that out, to learn and appreciate what God wants for us all to do, all we need to do is look to the Bible for guidance. Sometimes God's will, God's call for our lives is as simple as what the Bible commands us all to do. The best thing about this is that we don't have to agonize over this guidance, this path that the Lord has placed before us. It's pretty simple. Let's look at a few examples from Scripture.

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus tells his followers to "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

" In Mark 16:15, the Lord commands us to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." God's will for us is to evangelize, to share our story of faith with people we encounter.

In Ephesians 4:32, we are told to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Paul in his letter to the Philippians in 2:3 advises us to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” And in the Epistle of James, 1:27, the author writes that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

These are all things God calls us to do through Holy Scripture. This is standard, pure, loving guidance from the Lord. The Lord is calling us to do things all the time. We are called to do what the Lord commanded to his disciples so many years ago.

And in addition to that, let us all meditate on the question that Baldwin asks in *These Days*: “Do you follow wherever Christ points you?”

Where is Christ pointing you today? Christ is pointing us to do what he commanded in the New Testament, and that’s just a start. Jesus the Christ wants us to grow closer to him. To grow closer to his will for us. His will for us to live out the calls he makes to everyone through Holy Scripture, to Love God with your whole heart and soul and mind; to love your neighbor as yourself; to spread the Gospel of the Lord; to be kind and compassionate and forgive each other for wrongs done to us the way Christ forgives us our sins; and do nothing out of selfishness or conceit and be humble; to look after those in need and to keep ourselves from being poisoned by idolatry in the world. And that is just a few things.

Christ is seeking from us a commitment to a relationship with him. To go on a journey with him as our guide and teacher. To know he is always with us on this journey, and that in commitment to the Lord and answering the call of God, only good can come of it.

Baldwin writes that “The journey Christ asks of us is one of potential risks and uncertainties. When we are afraid of what a commitment might lead to, we often instinctually respond with, “What if?” excuses. What if he wants me to share my faith? What if he wants me to serve? What if he wants me to reconcile with my family?” Do you have excuses that hold you back from listening to the call of God? Do you have excuses holding you back from where God is directing you?”¹

And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Let us remember the example of the first apostles and their immediate commitment to the word of the Lord, to the will of God. May we all answer the call of God. May we all listen and hear that call. Amen.

¹ Diane M. Baldwin, “Come and See,” *These Days*, Jan. 18, 2024.