

## Matthew 4:12-23

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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Having interrupted readings from Matthew for Epiphany and Baptism by skipping over to John last Sunday, we are back at Matthew this week. But the skipping has omitted the story of Jesus' trial / tempting (this will be told in a few more weeks on the first Sunday of Lent). Instead, we repeat the calling of the first disciples.

Matthew 4:12-17, establishes Jesus as the successor of John the Baptist. We learn that John has been arrested, and Jesus has "withdrawn" - or fled; probably to avoid being arrested himself. He returns to Galilee at first, and then moves to Capernum - once again fulfilling a prophetic text, Isaiah 9:1-2.

Matthew 4:17 is a direct quote of John the Baptist's proclamation, 3:1

From this time, Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near (or, is at hand)."

The only problem with this is that in fact, from this point on, Matthew never reports Jesus as actually calling on people to repent! And "the Kingdom of heaven has come near" only occurs one more time when Jesus instructs the 12 to go out on their own (Matthew 10:7).

Bruce Malina dismisses modern interpretations of this passage as being about "final judgment," or "the end times." Jesus, and his followers / hearers would have only understood "has come near" as quite literally "what will happen next." The fact that the Kingdom of heaven did not happen next was the first crisis of faith Jesus' followers experienced after his execution. Their re-interpretation of how "has come near" is true in the life, execution, death and resurrection of Jesus was a bold act of imagination and re-invention of the world.

The command / invitation to Peter, Andrew, James and John to "Come, follow me," is not, "I wonder if you would consider the possibility of tagging along if you have the time and it's not too inconvenient."

The invitation / command to "follow" is to:

- accompany,
- learn from,
- respond to,
- imitate,
- be loyal to,
- bond with,
- abide in

The leaving of the fathers and the fishing is to establish a new set of kinship relationships (with Jesus and his other followers), and a new occupation, recruiters of others to the Way of Jesus.

Verse 4:23 provides a summary of Jesus' ministry which Matthew will report in more detail in the following chapters:

1. teaching (Chapters 5-7, the "Sermon on the Mount")
2. healing (Chapters 8-9)
3. proclaiming (Chapter 10 as the 12 are sent out)

For modern hearers of this story (as it also was beginning with the second and third generation of followers) there are a number of challenges:

1. Jesus was single. How do our relationships with friends and/or family compromise our undivided living the Way of Jesus?
2. Jesus was an itinerant (i.e., he traveled from place to place with no permanent residence of his own). How do the responsibilities of jobs and/or housing compromise our undivided living the Way of Jesus?

In other words, as people with jobs and mortgages and kids and aging parents and pets, just exactly how do we "Come, and follow?"

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