

“You Want Me?”

January 22, 2012

Shawn Thomas Smith

“they left...and followed him” Mark 1:18 and 20

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” ¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.¹

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. It was during the first six weeks of my 7th grade year at Gresham Junior High. I was a tiny, short, skinny kid. I was in the band: strike one. I was in the gifted program: strike two. And to top everything else off, I was not in the popular crowd: strike three. I was a nobody. And I certainly did not expect what happened on that day: The day I remember so well, and the words that came from Coach, “I want you to be on the wrestling team.”

Me, I thought, you want me! Me, a skinny, scrawny, miniscule kid with hardly any muscle on his body: Me, a kid who constantly lost to any wrestling or roughhousing with his brother: Me, a kid who was a nerd: Me, the kid who was not cool. I remember thinking that this would defiantly boost my status in Junior High. Perhaps I might make it in the cool crowd. My dork status of being in the gifted program and in the band might be forgotten if I were on a team known for strength. Sure I played soccer, but I could run fast, and I could dribble, and score, besides, my soccer team was a club team. This would be for the school. People would actually come to matches. People would see that I am more than just a nerd. All these thoughts ran through my mind as I asked the coach the definitive question, “You want me? Why?”

The response was not what I had expected. My expectation was to hear some words like, ‘because I see potential in you to be great at this.’ Or ‘you just have the build of a wrestler’ perhaps the words, ‘you are just a natural athlete and we could use you.’ These were the words I expected, but what I heard was completely unexpected.

“Because you will be in the smallest weight class: That weight class never has anyone in it and the team will always have a win.”

Wow. Way to completely shoot down the confidence of a 12 year old. Not only do you want me because I am scrawny, but because no one else will wrestle with me: The smallest weight class with no one in it: I am not gifted in strength, I am cursed with being small. I do not have potential; I am just a guaranteed win without having to do anything. Ouch. Why did coach want me? Not because of me, but because of what I could mean for a team.

Needless to say, I did not wrestle. I remained the dorky band nerd who was short and tiny throughout my two years at Gresham Junior High. But I kept on with who I was; knowing that even though the words from Coach cut to my core, there was more to me than just being small. I did have gifts to share. My intelligence, my ability to play music, and my speed in playing a sport I was already good at: soccer.

I relate this story to you because I am sure that perhaps many of you have similar stories where you were approached and asked to be a part of something you never expected: A time in life when you were needed to make something happen. I pray that your experience was not as mine, and that you were needed for who you were, and not what you were.

In Junior High, or middle school as it is known now, being chosen is a big deal, it changes as we get older and we realize part of our fitting in is being who we are, but in the young adolescent mind, to be chosen is monumental. Not only are you chosen, but you are needed. Think back to your childhood, and remember when two captains were chosen to pick teams. If you were called first, you knew that you were a part of something. You were necessary in whatever pickup game it might have been. As time progressed and the pickings got slim, you never wanted to be the last one picked. You wanted to at least have some worth, and not to hear the dreaded words well I guess I will take you since you are the last one.

¹ Mark 1:14-20, NRSV.

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The anxiety that happens in these situations is enough to bring butterflies to most of our stomachs. We find that when we are not necessary, that it is painfully difficult to feel a part of something. But when we hear the words, “I need you. I want you to be a part of something, I am asking you to come along.” These words bring us to an ecstatic realization that we are needed, we are necessary, and we are called to be a part,

I imagine that Simon and Andrew were probably ones that were seldom chosen for anything. They were not in the brightest profession; they were not the cream of the crop. They were just your regular, everyday, run of the mill, normal, nothing special about them fishermen. They had their trade, albeit an important one in the region of Galilee, but not a noble profession of wit and cunning, not a profession where they would be known for their oratory skills. A profession where they smelled bad, worked hard, and lacked the social graces to charm the masses with their charisma.

And yet, these two unlikely people are chosen by Jesus to come and follow. And they did just that. They dropped their nets immediately and followed Jesus. They left what they knew and followed.

But why did Jesus call these men? Why did he continue on down the beach and call James and John in the same manner? And why did James and John leave behind their father and follow Jesus?

These questions make us pause and think. And in our thinking we can ponder some of the reasons for their complete devotion to follow after such a brief encounter.

If we look at this from the perspective of what precedes our passage, we hear Jesus words, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”²

Perhaps these four fishermen, Simon, Andrew, James and John, had been followers of John the Baptist. They had heard about the one who was coming after John, the one that John the Baptist was not even worthy to stoop down to untie the thong of his sandal. Perhaps, all of these men were gathered at the River Jordan when the Spirit of God descended like a dove and rested upon the head of Jesus. They had seen what had happened. They knew who Jesus was, and they were ready to see that indeed the kingdom of God had come near: In the form of the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Whatever past actions occurred, Jesus comes to these four men and they left everything and followed him. They are willing to give up the secure life as fishermen, even willing to leave the family business, in the case of James and John. They were willing to risk everything because they wanted to follow Jesus.

Can the same be said for us? Are we willing to let go of what we know and understand and follow the Son of God? Are we willing to take risk to do what these men did? Or are we simply going to ask the question “You want ME?”

The answer is yes. Jesus does want you. And it is not because of what he can make you. God has already done that. Jesus wants you because of who you are. Because of the gift you possess. Jesus did not come to choose the best of the best; that is what a disciple was in the first century. When rabbis chose who were going to be their disciples, they chose upstanding, bright, intelligent men; ones that could disciple and listen, ones that would learn from the teacher and then impart their wisdom to the letter. Jesus was not choosing the best of the best, he was choosing common people. People who if screened by human resources, would not even make an initial interview.

Consider the following from Greg Ogden:

Memorandum

*To: Jesus Son of Joseph
Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop
Nazareth*

*From: Jordan Management Company
Jerusalem*

Dear Sir:

² Mark 1:15, NRSV.

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Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer but also arranged personnel interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely Yours,

Jordan Management Consultants³

Not exactly the picture of success in starting out a new enterprise. Yet Jesus is resolute in who he chooses. He is certain of the aptitude of these men, and he is confident in their ability despite what others might say. Jesus simply asked them to follow. And in doing so, these men would go on a three year journey of being with, following, learning, and immersion in Christ like behavior. But as we read through the gospels, we know that these men were far from perfect. Just as the memorandum states, they all had failings, failings that made them who they were, and failings that Jesus recognized and cultivated in these men from disciples into apostles. The ones that shared their experience, shared their knowledge, shared in the love Christ first shared with them to the masses. To have the humble beginnings of just 12 in his organization, Jesus certainly chose wisely the ones to impart his wisdom to the masses. It made it around the world. The message of the good news is still traveling to the far reaches of the globe, and the call to disciples still stands. Jesus is still asking each of you, come and follow.

Come and follow. Learn from me and I will teach you. This is not just a call to follow like a mindless devotee, but rather a call to be in relationship with, a call to be in fellowship with, and a call to give your life over to Christ. I fear that in our modern day ears, we hesitate to hear this call, and if we do, we are too afraid to give complete devotion. The challenge of discipleship is that we first have to surrender ourselves and place ultimate trust in our savior. This is not an easy thing to do, and the dominant message that we hear all around us is that I matter, I am important, I am an individual.

If we take the call from Jesus, then where do I fit in? Do I lose myself and just become another number in the line of so many others?

Well, tough as it is to realize, the answer is NO! You are still you: that is what Christ wants, that is why he was willing to call the most unlikely people, because they each had something to offer. You have something to offer. And you are not being picked last, though you might choose to come in at the last minute. The call to discipleship is extended to each of you. Jesus is asking will you come and follow me. Will you come and learn from my teaching, will you be my disciple, will you then take my words, share

³ Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Intervarsity Press, 2003.

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them with others, share in your experience in how the Christian life has shaped who you are, how your witness can change the life of another.

Last Sunday as I sang the song *The Summons* during Alison Unroe’s Ordination, I was struck by the poignancy of the lyrics and the questions that are asked:

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shone?

Will you let my life be known?

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?⁴

The summons is an apt title for the song, as it indeed summons each of us out of life to look at the question of discipleship that Jesus poses. The questions then comes are will willing to let our lives never be the same. Are we willing to let Christ’ love be shown, and Christ name be known and the word of God to grow within us transforming our very souls? This is the question: are we willing to be the bearers of the good news, to share the gospel, and live our faith in every second of life?

Do not get me wrong, I am not asking you to go door to door and ask if the person who opens has accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But rather your story is unique in how Jesus has been in your life. Your story is worthy for someone else to hear. It doesn’t have to be a blinding experience like Saul of Tarsus had on the road to Damascus. Instead, it just needs to be shared.

Jesus was very clear in his instructions to the disciples when his earthly ministry was concluded:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁵

These are our orders. This is the call on our lives. Blessed are those who bring the good news. You have a story to tell. You have been chosen. You have been selected not because of what you can become, but who you can become. Following Christ is not just here today. Following Christ is every day of your life. It is how you live not as a descent person, not as a Christian, but as a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ.

Sound like a tall order. Well it is. The devoted life is what Christ is calling us to. It is not a watered down, well it is only convenient for me to be a disciple on Sunday or on Wednesday night, but it is a call to be a disciple 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; and in this year 366 days.

Our lives are a reflection. When we reflect the grace of Christ, we shine in the darkness. When we reflect the negativity of the world around us, we dim in comparison. We have been called to be the light on the hill. We have been called to shine out brightly for others to see. Are we indeed shining? Are our lights burning bright for our savior, or are we dim reflections that only shine when it is convenient?

Well when I am at work I am a good person, but I do not share in my faith, that is not appropriate. When I am in line at the grocery store, I do not want to offend the person in front of me; they might not be a Christian. The jerk in front of me is in my way; that could not possibly be a brother or sister in Christ.

And yet, perhaps that person in line in front of you at the grocery store is waiting for you to share some good news. That person who cut you off is going frantically to the hospital after hearing some bad news and needs your compassion. Perhaps the coworker that you are afraid to talk about matters of faith is just as afraid as you are to carry on the same conversation. Does this give us the excuse to compartmentalize our call to discipleship? No. it only makes it convenient to us.

Jesus asks us to follow: Invites us to walk with him, and to let him be our guide. Jesus gives us the choice to live life in constant prayer and devotion, or to live life as a would-be follower.

Which question is easier to answer, I am a Christian? Or I am a disciple?

⁴ John, Bell. “*The Summons*,” WGRG the Iona Community (Scotland) 1987.

⁵ Matthew 28:18-20, NRSV.

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A Christian is someone who knows who Christ is

A disciple is one who shares who Christ is.

Who are you?

And when you are asked to follow, and believe me I assure you, you are asked. What will your response be? Will you leave everything and immediately follow, or will you keep on with the question: “You want me?” Amen.