

With Matthew's Gospel this morning, we are privileged to listen to his account of the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry. The setting is the coastal town of Capernaum, a small hamlet on shore of the Sea of Galilee. The village is a ruin today, but it was inhabited until about 750 AD. Its importance lies only in that Jesus lived there for a while, taught there in its synagog many times, healed St. Peter's mother-in-law, among others and reached out to a Roman officer by healing the man's servant.

It was in Capernaum that our Lord's earthly ministry began, and it was there that Jesus found and called his first disciples. That is the subject of the gospel reading that we have for today, Matthew's account of the calls to Andrew and Peter, James and John. Capernaum was a fishing village, and all of these men were fishermen, blue collar working folk, people Jesus spotted as he walked along the lake shore. "Come," Jesus said to each of them, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew tells us that, in each case, the brothers immediately stopped what they were doing, walked away from those things that might bind them and hold them back, and followed in the footsteps of Jesus. We can think what we will about the pragmatics of their decisions. What goes through my head is that I would have liked a little more information about Jesus before I gave up everything to follow him, but caution is not always a good Christian attribute. Clearly, St. Matthew has a point in describing the brother's immediate and unequivocal response. He wants us to know, from the beginning, that to be a disciple of Jesus Christ we must give him our total commitment. There is no room for hesitation or reservation, a point made over and over in the gospel accounts of our Lord's ministry. With Christian discipleship, there is no holding back. You are either in the boat with Jesus or you are drowning in the sea. With Jesus, there is no middle ground.

"Follow me," Jesus said, and the brothers followed. They were with our Lord from that moment on, his closest disciples, and they were key to much of the earliest church's development and growth. Keep in mind that these folk were simple people, not highly educated by any means. They were just typical working folk, who by following the Master and doing the Master's work were able to change the world. This should tell us that we can't beg off the call to discipleship by pleading inadequacy. That doesn't work with God. God equips us, as necessary, to do the work he gives us to do.

This story of the calling of Andrew and Peter, James and John serves as a model for us to understand our own vocation, and by vocation I am not referring to how we earn our living. There is a vocation that is more fundamental than what type of work we do. That fundamental vocation is our Christian vocation, and for all of us, it is the same, even though in its exercise we each have different roles to play. Each of us, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is called to Christian discipleship. We are called to fish for men and women, girls and boys and bring them to the knowledge and love of the Lord. That is a tasking, a fundamental Christian obligation laid upon us at our baptism: "Know Christ and make him known!" We are called to live lives that make Jesus attractive to those who do not know him. This means that people should be able to see, in us, some beacon, some light that attracts them to Jesus. Living the Christian life is an awesome responsibility, and it is a responsibility that we ought not shirk. To do so is to sin.

We begin to understand, when we consider Christian vocation, that discipleship is not something easy and ordinary. Discipleship requires commitment. With a bit of digging, you can see this in today's Gospel reading. Matthew tells us that the brothers immediately left all that they had behind; they left their jobs and worldly goods, to follow Jesus. They never looked back. They simply began doing the

work of Christ in this world and did it, without ceasing, until they died. They preached the Good News to those with ears to hear. They taught the faith to anyone open to the love of God. They healed in the name of Jesus. They visited the sick and those in prison. They comforted the afflicted and they afflicted, with the Word of God, those who were a bit too comfortable. Most of all, they brought others into the Kingdom of God through baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were, indeed, fishers of men.

You and I are called to the ministry of discipleship. It is easy to think that only the clergy need do this, but that has never been the case. There is something to be said about the concept of the “priesthood of all believers.” All that are baptized into the death and resurrection of the Lord have the same call, the same tasking, the same obligation, and it will be our tasking every day of our lives: Make Christ Jesus known! Discipleship can take many forms. Each of us have unique gifts, abilities and skills and each of us discover different needs and requirements, as we do Christ's work in this world. The common theme for disciples is living in and for Jesus Christ. The reward is eternal life with our Saviour. *Amen.*