

## **Come and Follow: The Royal Invitation**

[Connection Card]

Who we follow is what defines us --

Story of being invited into the Governor's office to personally meet Governor Quie.

That's a story I love to tell because it feels so great to have had that opportunity. It feels great to be included. And it feels terrible to be left on the outside looking in.

Imagine what it was like for four young fishermen to be invited to become Jesus' disciples. When Jesus said, "Come, follow me," or more literally, "Come after me," He was saying something that everyone understood in that day. Rabbis of that day would make this simple but formal invitation for individuals to become their disciples and follow them in order to learn by listening, observing, and practicing what the master Rabbi did and taught. This was not a casual invitation. It was a radical calling that would alter the trajectory of their lives.

The reason this story is included in the gospel of Mark is that Jesus wants to extend the same invitation to us today. This royal invitation is for you – picture your name embossed in gold on his royal invitation. Today, we launch a church-wide study on the Gospel of Mark called "Come and Follow." We will discover what it really means for us to be a follower of Jesus. His invitation can be summed up in three words: Come, Follow, Fish. Mark 1:14-18:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

Let's begin with Jesus' first word for us today:

### **1. Come.**

When Jesus says, "Come," He's inviting us to begin a relationship with Him where He is our master and we are His disciples. Most often, we think of the invitation to believe in Jesus has to do only with the forgiveness of our sins and for eternal life. But what we

don't often think of is that Jesus invites us into a relationship in which we follow Him as our master, our Rabbi. To believe in Jesus is to follow Jesus. These things go together.

One of the world's greatest tightrope walkers was a man named Charles Blondin. On the day that he walked a tightrope across Niagara Falls, he amazed the audience. Everyone believed he was the best in the world. But when Blondin asked if there any volunteers who were willing to get into the wheelbarrow that he had wheeled across, no one would dare. Finally, a little boy volunteered to get into the wheelbarrow. And Blondin was able to safely bring him across.

When we hear Jesus say, "Come," we are challenged to hop into the wheelbarrow and trust Him to lead our lives. If you are a control-freak or if you are full of fear it's going to be hard to respond to Jesus. How about you? Are you ready to put your trust in Jesus?

We see in verses 14-15 what we must clearly do to come to Jesus.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

John the Baptist was the prophet sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah – Jesus to come. John called people to be baptized as a picture to show our need to be spiritually washed clean – to confess our sins and ask God to forgive us. Later, when John was put in prison, it was God's time for Jesus to begin His ministry. So Jesus began preaching in Galilee.

The good news of God was very clear – "the kingdom of God has come near." In other words, Jesus was the King of kings, the Messiah, and He had come near! This was truly an amazing moment. What had always seemed like a tiny hope flickering light years away in the night sky was actually happening! This was a decisive moment! The Son of God had come into the world and was finally starting His ministry!

We have all been trained pretty well to be skeptical about anyone who wants to lead us. We question the wisdom of our political leaders and integrity is often an issue. We see people trying to use the system to their advantage. And we grow weary of it all.

So how could it be good news that Jesus claims He wants to be your king? In Mark 1:1, we read of the "gospel" which is the same word for "good news."

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It's good news that Jesus is the King because of who He is. He's the Messiah or the Christ – the One that God promised to save us from our sins. And it's good news because Jesus is the Son of God. We will never find the perfect leader as long as he or she is human. But in Jesus we actually see God coming to earth in human flesh. And this means

that all of the chaos and destruction and sadness in this world will one day be redeemed. We need a King like that!

So we are to believe in Him. But our response is also very clear: “Repent and believe the good news!” So coming to Jesus means that we repent or turn from our rebellious sins toward God and we believe that Jesus is God’s Son sent by God to be our delivering King. Coming to Jesus requires two actions that are two sides of the same coin: repent and believe. We see this elsewhere in Scripture. Acts 20:21:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Repentance means that we no longer believe that sin is going to give us life and joy and satisfaction – we turn from sin. Faith in the Lord Jesus means that we believe that Jesus will give us life and joy and peace.

Have you responded to Jesus’ call to come? Have you repented or turned from sin and put your faith in Jesus as your King to lead your life? This is how we respond to Jesus’ invitation to “Come.”

[Give a specific call.]

## 2. Follow.

Jesus came to four fishermen named Simon, Andrew, James and John and actually called them to follow Him without delay. That meant that they were to leave their fishing nets behind. They were to leave their jobs and follow Jesus. So these guys left what was comfortable to them; what was a familiar routine; what was the only life they knew. And they struck out on a new journey – trailing behind Jesus with their eyes fixed on Him. They were to watch, learn, listen, and do. But it all started with the invitation by Jesus and their willing response.

It’s different but similar for us. Jesus doesn’t physically show up or audibly call us to follow. But this gospel is written so that we’ll do more than just read a nice story. It’s written so that we’ll hear God’s call to follow Jesus, too. Jesus is alive today. He’s working in our world. And the Lord Jesus still calls people to follow Him even today. He speaks to us through the Scripture and as the Holy Spirit awakens our hearts to what God is saying to us. What might God be saying to you today? Mark 1:16-20:

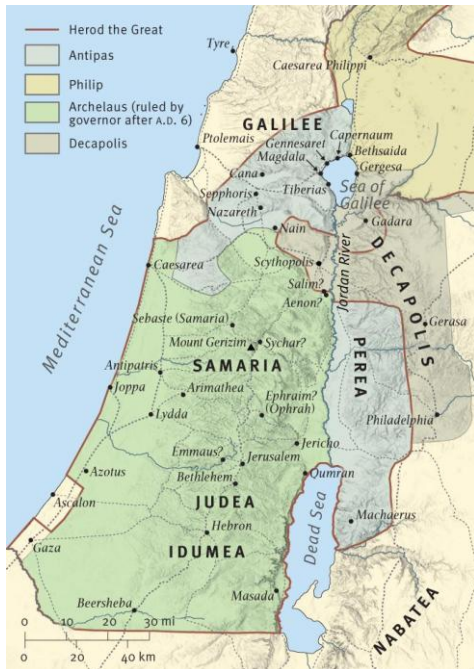
As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Acts 19:4; Hebrews 6:1.

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Notice several things. First, the location is the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had actually taken up residence in Capernaum on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. You can see the Sea of Galilee on the north part of this map of the Holy Land. It is more of a lake than a sea being 13 miles long and 7 miles wide.



Second, Jesus took the initiative. In both cases, Jesus steps into their worlds. He came into their realm; their workplace; their lives. What initiative is the Lord taking in your life?

Third, Jesus sees them. In verse 16, Jesus saw Simon (that's Peter) and Andrew. In verse 19, Jesus saw James and John. He physically saw them. But there is a sense in which

Jesus really sees us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows, too, what we can become as we follow Him. God has a work He wants to do in your life. Ephesians 2:10:

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Notice, fourth, that these four men responded Verse 18 begins with the words "At once" and verse 20 begins "Without delay." It is the same Greek word – *euthews*. It's one of Mark's favorite words – he uses it 42 times out of the total 59 times it's used in the New Testament. Mark uses it here to describe their immediate response of faith; a decision that would take them from their old life and took them on a journey of following Jesus where He would lead them. There was no debate. There was no, "Let me pray about it." It was immediate obedience that came from faith in Jesus.

And fifth, these men stepped into a relationship with Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark we are going to be invited into a relationship with Jesus. We're going to be introduced to the identity of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus. And we're going to be invited into a relationship with Jesus that goes beyond just following some religious rules. We're going to fellowship with Jesus, confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, see His righteous conduct, follow His teaching, and be shaped by a relationship with Jesus.

Are you ready to follow Jesus?

Five Commitments: TAG Time; Pray; Serve; Give; Growth Groups – all to help you follow Jesus! (You can still respond if you did not last week.)

There were many who followed Jesus out of curiosity. When the Minnesota Twins caravan comes to town, it's a fun thing; it's a curiosity. That's the way it is for many in relationship to Jesus. They hear about Jesus so they want to follow Him to see what He can do. But Jesus is not calling us to follow Him for the show. He's calling us to follow Him because He is the Son of God. To follow anyone else would be foolish!

Are you ready to follow Jesus?

Some here may have made that commitment to follow Jesus but right now struggle with trials or testing or temptation. It's not always easy to follow Jesus. But never forget that God "works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Never forget that God always provides a way out of temptation when you are tempted (1 Corinthians 10:13). God will help you to follow Him – even in the deepest valleys! Don't give up and don't lose hope!

### 3. **Fish.**

Can you see Simon and Andrew having just thrown out a net from their boat? Jesus comes and says, "Come, follow Me," and they just drop their nets and follow Him! Or

picture James and John's father. They are mending the nets and they just leave. Imagine the look on the dad's face. Jesus used the setting of that moment to communicate His disciple's new calling. Look at Mark 1:17-18:

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”<sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus gives them a very clear purpose: I will make you fishers of men. This was a crucial moment for these men. They were transitioning from being “driven” to being “called.” Studs Terkel wrote in his book *Working* that “. . . our jobs are too small for our souls. What we really need is a calling.” Jerry Sheveland writes,

Like these four fishermen, when we leave our nets behind to really follow Jesus, something big happens to us. Jesus does not only save our souls. He enlarges the meaning of our lives. We have become called people.

The kingdom of this world that is temporary, corrupt, and soon to be judged loses its power over us. Now we are citizens of heaven and we serve Jesus, who is the coming King. A new net is placed in our hands. And in every circle of influence we cast this new net in the hopes that some will be caught up in the saving grace and glorious truth of knowing Jesus as King. We know that we have been rescued from darkness and our own rebellion. Now we are compelled by Christ's love to fish.

But what makes us good fishermen and women? What gives us influence is the change that Jesus is bringing in our own lives. What Jesus is transforming in us is what makes what makes our faith real and contagious to others.

[illustration – of someone's life change affecting someone else]

So three words describe Jesus' call to each one of us: **Come, Follow, Fish.** And this deserves real attention right now. Ask yourself these questions:

Has Jesus, by His Holy Spirit, stepped into your life and called you to come to Him in a way that requires a changed life?  
Have you repented of living a self-directed life of spiritual rebellion and placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior and King?  
Are you following Jesus? What is He leading you to do right now without delay?  
Do you respond to Jesus with immediate and decisive faith?  
Does Christ's “Come, Follow, Fish” invitation sound like good news to you or a demanding obligation? What you truly believe about Jesus will determine how you answer this question. Why not use the *Come and Follow* study to set other things aside to get to know Jesus better? The things of this world are too small for your soul. You have a greater calling. Jesus extends His royal invitation to you even today: “Come, Follow, Fish.”

## **Next Steps**

- I need to accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him by repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus.
- I will do the *Come and Follow* daily study.
- I will attend a *Come and Follow* group.
- I will attend church next Sunday.

## **Communion**

Jesus did not die on the cross so that we would be cynical about life transformation.

- You may have seen people become teary-eyed and pray the prayer but their lives has never changed. Like Huck Finn's alcoholic pappy –
- “The old drunk cried and cried when Judge Thatcher talked to him about (changing his ways). (He) said he'd been a fool and was going to turn over a new leaf. And everyone hugged him and cried and said it was the holiest time on record. And that night he got drunker than he had ever been before.”

You may have seen that. You may be cynical. But watch out that your cynicism does not prevent you from believing that mighty King Jesus can and does transform hearts and lives!

So what is repentance? It's a change of heart and mind. It's not a good cry. It's not an emotional moment. It's a deep change of heart in which you personally stop trusting in your own wisdom; your ways. You stop believing that the temptations of this world are what truly give you life. You have this firm conviction deep in your spirit that only Jesus can satisfy your deepest longings; that only Jesus can help you live for God's glory in this world; that only Jesus can save you from yourself; that only Jesus can make you to become what you were created to be. You have this childlike faith that trusts his daddy in every way. You let go of your disappointments and anger and you ask God to forgive you. You are sorry that you have wronged the very God that created you. That would be repentance and faith in Jesus.

Have you repented? Have you believed?

## **Benediction**

Mark 1:15

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”