

3 Epiphany
Matthew 4:12-23
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On Tuesday nights St. Luke's is offering through April 11th a class called "The Jesus Movement: Discipleship for the 21st Century." The term "The Jesus Movement" has been popularized in recent years by Michael Curry who is the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Bishop Curry has written a wonderful book that we're using on Tuesday nights called *Crazy Christians: A Call to Follow Jesus*. It's a wonderful book of edited sermons and addresses. It makes for a wonderful book that asks us to look at what it means to follow Jesus Christ in the 21st century. And that is what we're talking about in class on Tuesday nights. What does discipleship look like in our modern world? Bishop Curry has given new life to the term "The Jesus Movement," and I'm grateful that he has. But it's important to know that the term itself is not new. For years people have used the term "The Jesus Movement" to talk about the movement that grew up around Jesus in the first century. "The Jesus Movement" has been the term to designate those who follow Jesus who were not numbered among the twelve disciples. And so today's gospel lesson gives us a window into what the Jesus Movement looked like in the very beginning.

This gospel passage is a snapshot of what the Jesus Movement was like at the very start. Almost any Christian, whether we're brought up in the faith as children or whether we come to it as an adult, almost any Christian very early on learns about the twelve disciples, that Jesus chose to surround himself with an inner circle of twelve followers. But these people were not called just to follow, they were called to ministry. Today in the gospel passage we have one of the most memorable verses in all of the Bible when Jesus says to his first disciples, the first members of the Jesus Movement, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." These first members of the Jesus Movement are called not just to follow, but they are called to active witness in the name of Jesus Christ. They're called to ministry.

There's something interesting historically about Jesus and his first disciples. This doesn't get a lot of attention but I think it's important. A scholar named Ben Witherington, a New Testament scholar, has noted, "Jesus seems to be the first rabbi to actively recruit disciples in early Judaism." I just want us to stop for a moment and think about this. Up until the time of Jesus, as far as we can gather historically from the records that exist, rabbis did not recruit students. It was up to the student to choose the rabbi, to take the initiative. There

is no meaningful record of Jewish rabbis going out and looking for students. They were content to let the students come to them. Jesus provides the first record of a rabbi going to people and saying, "Follow me." And I'm taking the time to mention this because I think it has enormous implications for the life of the church. This church in particular and the Church in general! We aren't to sit here and wait for people to come to us. Our calling is to go to them with good news and an invitation to join in the Jesus Movement. It's an enormously important lesson to learn from Jesus. He didn't wait for people to come to him, he went to people and offered them hope, compassion, love, and acceptance.

I want to look at two verses specifically. The first verse is the last verse of today's gospel lesson, Matthew 4:23. Matthew tells us: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." Scholars of the New Testament agree what gave the Jesus Movement its initial momentum must have been the healing power of Jesus. We have to try to imagine as 21st century people in our culture life without modern medicine. Think of all we've come to depend on from the relatively minor things to life-changing health situations. We are dependent on what we've come to call "modern medicine." So imagine living in a culture, in a time where all there are are herbs and the most primitive kinds of surgery. This rabbi, Jesus, has this power that emanates from him, power to heal. Imagine being there and sensing that after all of the years, after generations of waiting - he might be the one. He might really be the Messiah.

So this is how the Jesus Movement begins. People making that initial decision - 'I will follow him.' And then two verses past this one, it's not actually in today's gospel lesson, but in Matthew 4:25 he tells us: "And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." We're talking right now a lot about "The Jesus Movement." The term has been given great currency in the Episcopal Church the last few years. We're using it for our major Christian education event, Episcopal 401. "The Jesus Movement" - it's an important term in our time. But it's important to understand where it comes from, and it comes from this moment that Matthew records for us, when people began to sense, 'We are living in the time when God himself has come among us.' The beginning of the movement that we are here today to claim our part in. This is an enormously important window into history - this passage in Matthew. It's enormously important for our spiritual lives. We've been invited to follow just like the original disciples.

Today we have to answer the question: Will we follow? Will we take the good news of Jesus Christ into this world that is so desperate for a legitimate, meaningful message of love, reconciliation, and hope?

I want to end with one brief quotation from a Zambian New Testament scholar who has made, in my opinion, a fantastic observation. To me this is the most succinct, poignant definition of “The Jesus Movement” that I know of. It's by a scholar named Joe Kapolyo: "The Christian faith has always been and will always be a missionary faith. It exists to send followers out into the world to draw people to the good news that God's appointed Savior of the world is Jesus, and that he died so that we may have life eternal.'

What a glorious privilege we have to say that we too are members of the Jesus Movement. Amen.