

Jesus chose twelve men to be his apostles. With about half of those we hardly know anything more than their names. With the rest, we know a bit more, but not too much. The Gospels tell us primarily about Jesus, not his disciples. The disciple we know the most about is Peter, who is also called Simon. Our Gospel reading tells us more about him.

Our reading begins by telling us about a crowd who was pressing in on Jesus, eager to hear him. They were so packed together, it was as if they were laying on him—their interest was that intense! But where was Peter? Not in the crowd. He was down the shore, cleaning his nets. Why? It wasn't because he hated Jesus. The reason might be hinted at later in the reading: he had worked all night and caught nothing. Fishing was his livelihood—no fish meant no food, no income, no way to pay the bills. He had to get ready to try again.

Maybe you've been there—stuck in a job you don't like, grinding through mundane tasks. It's exhausting. It's depressing. A person might wonder how to escape.

One of the most plausible solutions for no longer needing to work is money. If you get enough money you could retire early. Move to a beach somewhere. But maybe that goal is out of reach for you. Instead you might just dream about having a nice little nest egg. If only I had a little more, I would have to live hand to mouth. These thoughts make sense. Money can do a lot!

Maybe Peter had thoughts like that while he was bending over his nets, cleaning them out for the millionth time. If only he wouldn't have to work so hard. If only he could get ahead.

What is interesting about Peter is that if those were his goals, then Jesus made them come true, but then Peter left all of that behind. When Jesus drove the fish into the nets, Peter had never had a bigger catch. The boats were so full they began to sink. So many fish! So much money! But instead of celebrating, and instead of investing, he left it all behind. It says, **“When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Jesus.”**

I would like to consider what happened to Peter. Why did he leave that bonanza behind to follow Jesus? But before we begin to answer that, I think it is helpful to point out how difficult the answer will be for us to take seriously. We have been trained since infancy that money and power are the most important and useful things in life. Therefore we have some commands that we live by, according to that principle: Do what is best for you. Seek your own advantage. The more you can get for yourself, the better. These are taken to be the basic facts of life, and only a fool or a fanatic would live otherwise. That is probably how most of us took Peter's actions today when we heard them. We thought, perhaps unconsciously: “That has nothing to do with me. I am not an apostle. Peter is some strange sort of person that I am under no obligation to imitate.” That is not true, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus says in another place, **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will keep it for eternal life.”** This verse is a good way to understand what took place with Peter. Maybe he had been dreaming about boat-fulls of fish that make him rich. If he made enough money, maybe he could start a franchise. Then other people could do all the work, and he could cash all the checks. That's not what happened. If Peter had dreams like that, he left them behind for something better.

But was it better? That is the question. Should you or should you not be a follower of Jesus? Is it better to deny yourself, to take up your cross, and follow Jesus, or is it better to indulge yourself, avoid all trouble and suffering, and chase your own dreams?

When Peter left behind the many thousands of dollars worth of fish to follow Jesus he was rejecting a way of life that many assume to be the best life possible. Many assume that there is nothing higher or better than chasing after your own success. Peter, in contrast, put himself completely in the hands of Jesus with his kingdom. He became a disciple, which means, "student" or "follower."

The life that ensued for Peter wasn't filled with wealth or prestige, but God did give him each day his daily bread. God gave him a good conscience through the forgiveness of sins. He was given the hope of seeing the glory of God in heaven. On the other hand, Peter faced suffering, embarrassment, and failure. He wept bitterly, was criticized, imprisoned, and, according to tradition, crucified upside down.

Was this life better than the self-seeking life he left behind at the beach? Absolutely! Already it was far more honorable, plus there is the resurrection from the dead. Let us not discount the importance of the resurrection. Paul says that were there is no resurrection from the dead, then we Christians are to be pitied above all people. If there were no resurrection, then perhaps it would make sense to live in the way that is so common among us, where the highest goals in life are merely to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. On the other hand, however, if there is a resurrection from the dead, then it is foolish *not* to live under Christ in his kingdom. Otherwise we will find ourselves to have been on the wrong side.

It is safe to say that we live in a time and among a people who do not take the resurrection seriously. We are thoroughly earthly minded. Our culture values profit, growth, and success above everything else. We are taught to be completely self-obsessed. The mantra most of us live by is: "If it isn't good for me, then I'm not doing it." That is a pathetic and ultimately unsatisfying way to live.

Jesus's ways are better. Jesus teaches us to live outside of ourselves in God. God is righteous and just. He loves life. He cares for the poor and hurting. He reaches out to people who are regarded as untouchable and unclean. He is not threatened by bluster and intimidation. He loves what is right. To be is to enter into this realm of God. What he likes we are to like. What he hates we are to hate. What he speaks we are to speak. And this is where disciples get into trouble. There has never been a shortage of people who think that they can dictate whatever they want to have happen, and they will punish whoever gets in their way. The disciples of Jesus get in their way, and this causes trouble.

Peter along with almost all of the other apostles would be put to death for continuing to testify to Jesus and Jesus's ways when powerful people told them to stop. Christians' willingness to die for the sake of Christ can be puzzling because people's default understanding is that this life is everything. Why needlessly suffer?

But Christians believe in Christ's kingdom that will result in the resurrection. That is the glory we must strive after, otherwise it won't seem as though the sacrifices are worth it. It is always easier to leave the devil be, to leave evil alone, to allow this world to rot with all of its corruption instead of fighting, but that is what you have been called to do. You have been called to follow Jesus.

Where should you go? You need not go anywhere necessarily. There is no shortage of evil or corruption all around us. There is a great deal of evil within us, with our sinful flesh, that we can fight against. Peter could have been a disciple of Jesus within his livelihood of being a fisherman if Jesus hadn't specifically called him to be an apostle. There are temptations and evil particular to being a fisherman and businessman that Christians are called to fight against and correct. All of us, no matter what our callings in life are, have temptations and sins and corruption that are particular to our situation. It is easy, of course, not to care. You will have fewer troubles if you only care about yourself. But that is not the point of life.

God revealed the point of life to Peter. It is to follow Jesus the Christ. He is at work in his kingdom fighting against the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. The Holy Spirit is writing God's Law on the hearts of Christians. The world is getting ready for the resurrection from the dead, and we all, as Christians, have our part. We are all members of the body of Christ. Therefore, this life that we have been called into as followers of Jesus is not a hobby, or a way to pass the time. Nor is it senseless or foolish. Nothing is more serious and practical.

Let God's kingdom come. Let his will be done. Amen.