

January 27, 2008--Matthew 4:12-23

While in college, my friends and I would occasionally drive down from Massachusetts to Connecticut to gamble at Foxwood's Resort and Casino. One particular evening while I was watching one of my friends play roulette, something quite interesting happened.

A gentleman strolled up to the roulette table placed the maximum bet on two numbers, wavered for a moment as he thought about his bet, then asked the roulette official to change one of his bets. And then he blurted out to everyone at the table, "Quick, change your bets to 17 and 34, quick!" It took a moment for what he said to register, and then I thought to myself this guy is crazy. I'm sure that was going through everyone else's mind as well because I didn't see a single person change their bets.

Wouldn't you know it that one of his numbers came up and he won thousands of dollars! And what perhaps is more amazing is that the other number this guy bet on was right next to the number that won on the roulette wheel.

I don't know if what happened was just dumb luck or if something else was going on. However, this event illustrates to me just how little influence words have, particularly the words of a stranger, they really have very little influence over changing other people's behaviors and actions. This guy at the roulette table said what he said with incredible conviction and confidence and not a single person budged to change their bets.

I would imagine if I stepped down out of the pulpit right now and asked each one of you to get up out of your seats follow me outside there would probably be a variety of responses. There would be some of you who would say, "not a chance am I going outside with you, it's cold out there or that's not what you do during a sermon!" Others of you would insist on getting more information before making a decision, asking me "what are we going to do out there?" Or "Where are we going?"

And then some of you would probably without hesitation or without asking questions follow me right outside. And this is only because most of you know me and I have some sort history with you that says you can trust me

I am certain though that if any one of you was sitting at the roulette table that day--- you would not have changed your bet no matter how insistent that gentleman was. Why, because this guy would have been a stranger, you wouldn't have know of him from Adam.

And yet when Jesus approaches Peter and Andrew, James and John sitting in their fishing boat by the Sea of Galilee, they don't know him either but immediately they get up out of their boat and they follow him, they change their bets. Not only do they not know him, but they wouldn't have even heard of this guy, Jesus.

Because up to this point in Matthew, Jesus really, hasn't done anything to get himself noticed. He hasn't performed any great miracles; he has yet to make his mark as a great teacher or prophet. He's been out in the desert for forty days hanging out with the devil, being tempted.

Jesus' call to Peter, Andrew, James, and John in the gospel of Matthew is bare bones and simple, its without frills or fireworks, and amazingly all that this stranger, Jesus, says to them is "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

And their response was just as simple as their call. Matthew writes, "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him." In James and John's case, they not only left their nets but they left their family as well.

There wasn't hesitation, they don't question Jesus call. They follow with "radical obedience" as biblical scholar Douglas Hare described their response.

But you know what, they did have a choice when Jesus summoned them to follow him. They had an opportunity to decide whether or not they were going to follow Jesus.

On the one hand, they could decide that the life they knew, their life as fishermen was all that they needed. That this career they had built would suit them just fine. That the cost of giving it up, leaving their family behind, of following this stranger, Jesus was just too great.

I wonder how many people Jesus asked before he came across Peter and Andrew. How many people said, “You know what I’m really not interested,” or “maybe you could check back with me at some other time.”

Then on the other hand, maybe Jesus offer to follow him, maybe it was just too irresistible. Maybe in that call to a life of fishing for people Peter, Andrew, James, and John would find meaning and purpose to their lives?

Something they couldn't find sitting in their fishing boats, mending their nets, catching fish.

Peter, Andrew, James and John got out of their fishing boats; they decided to follow Christ even though he was a stranger, even though they didn't know where the road would lead them or even how they would get there.

In faith, they entrusted their lives to Christ. they followed Christ and in their following their lives would forever be changed for the better because day in and day out they walked with and experienced the presence of God in the person of Christ Jesus.

A walk that never would have happened if they had stayed in their fishing boats, they too would have been just some of the other people that Jesus passed by answering him like countless others-- "Maybe not today" or "Why don't you check back with me some other time."

Will we allow our fishing boats to be the focus of our lives or will we focus our attention on that person passing by on the shoreline who calls us to step out of our boats to come and follow him?

When Christ passes by how do you plan on answering when the call comes?

Amen