



Pastor of the
International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Mark 1:16-20
Title: Follow Me
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today brings to a close a ministry adventure for Claire and me that began on June 15, 2008 in Cologne. These past twenty-six months have brought incredible changes and new experiences into our lives. In the summer of 1997 we made a huge decision to leave Fort Worth, Texas and move to Boiling Springs, North Carolina. Claire had lived in Fort Worth virtually all of her life, and I had lived there mostly from 1964 to 1997 -- over thirty years. The Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex is a huge region of almost thirteen million people. But in God's timing we were convinced that a dramatic change in ministry had become necessary. So we packed up our belongings and moved to tiny Boiling Springs, North Carolina, some 1,600 Kilometers to the east of Fort Worth. The culture shock in moving from a huge urban region to western North Carolina in a town of less than four thousand permanent residents was tremendous. I've often said to students in North Carolina that I experienced less culture shock between living in Texas and in Germany, than in moving from Texas to North Carolina. When we made this move we anticipated living in North Carolina the remainder of our lives. But, as I have learned over the many years of ministry, one never knows where life will be lived out in seeking to be obedient to God's leadership.

After eleven years in North Carolina God began stirring up the pot again in our lives with a growing conviction that another change was coming. As many of you know quite well, in the spring of 2008 God began working both in our lives and in the church here to bring us together. At the beginning, I didn't even know there was an IBC church in Cologne. And then, when Dr. Martin in a phone conversation mentioned to me the needs of the church in April of 2008, I didn't know much about this congregation. Out of the several options for serving IBC churches in Europe that he presented to me, I had a strange conviction that we were supposed to come to Cologne. And so at the first of May we agreed to come help the church during the summer of 2008 in order to explore God's leadership for ministry here in Germany. In miraculous fashion God brought everything together for us to come over the middle of June.

During these past two years we all have witnessed God working in wonderful fashion in our church. From the edge of collapse the church has 'resurrected' itself to become a strong, stable congregation of today. Some IBC pastors earlier suggested that the church should be called the Phoenix Baptist Church, after the legendary bird of ancient Greek mythology that recreated itself out of the ashes of destruction. In reality, God chose to breath new life into this congregation so that it could survive and then thrive as a witness to the Gospel in the city of Cologne. Why God did this can only be explained by His grace, for no merit on the part of any of us should mandate such a miracle.

The path of ministry for Claire and me, since the very beginning of our life together in the early 90s, has been to seek to follow Jesus wherever He chose to lead us. The calling of Jesus to the first four disciples in Mark 1:16-20 stands as a theme and a challenge to us in ministry. Listen to Mark's description of this event in his Gospel account:

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.¹

The importance of this event in early Christianity is underscored by the inclusion of it in all three Synoptic Gospels.² At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry He chose two sets of brothers -- Peter and Andrew; James and John -- who would form an important part of the Twelve Disciples, i.e., the Apostles, that would become the foundation of the Chris-



¹GNT: 1.16 Καὶ παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἶδεν Σίμωνα καὶ Ἀνδρέαν τὸν ἀδελφὸν Σίμωνος ἀμφιβάλοντας ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ· ἦσαν γὰρ ἀλιεῖς. 1.17 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων. 1.18 καὶ εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. 1.19 Καὶ προβάς ὀλίγον εἶδεν Ἰάκωβον τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα, 1.20 καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτούς. καὶ ἀφέντες τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν Ζεβεδάιον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ.

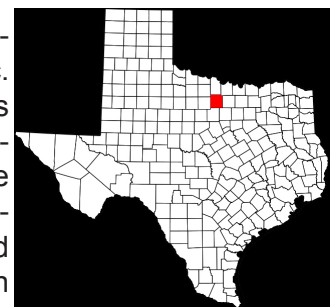
²Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 4:14-15.

tian movement after His ascension back to Heaven. At the heart of these call narratives in the Synoptic Gospels is the challenge of Jesus to these Galilean fishermen to follow Him. He did not tell them where He would take them; He promised them nothing materially; He made no guarantees about how easy or hard their life would be. They were challenged to leave everything familiar and comfortable in order to follow this Jewish carpenter's Son into an unknown future. And the texts of all three gospel accounts stress that immediately these four men obeyed Jesus. They left family and friends to begin a brand new adventure serving God. No one of them could have imagined any of the things that lay ahead over the remainder of their lives.



In October of 1956 God called me to follow Jesus in gospel ministry. Unlike these four Galilean fishermen I struggled for months with this calling. Becoming a preacher was not on my list of priorities. I had already made a commitment to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy in order to become a jet pilot. Afterwards was the plan to then attend MIT university in Boston in order to gain a degree in aerodynamical engineering in order to learn how to design airplanes. My dream was to design and fly airplanes. But God had other plans in mind.

From that acknowledgement of God's calling in 1956 in the small ranching community of Perrin, Texas God has taken me from a ranching life of horses, cattle etc. to serving churches as guest preacher and pastor of churches in the United States and in Germany and France. For thirty six years that calling placed me in the seminary and university classroom in Texas, North Carolina and Germany. At the same time opportunities to preach, lead Bible conferences, pastor etc. in countless number of church and church retreats came along. Not ever in my wildest dreams could I have imagined how God would work in my life. Life in the Lord's service has been one adventure after another.

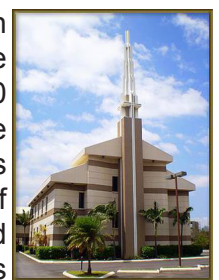


And now after two years of service in Germany God is calling us to another brand new place: Costa Rica. And in a manner very similar to the previous times when a change of direction in ministry took place, this opportunity arose quickly and quite unexpectedly. In June I barely knew that an IBC church existed in Costa Rica. As we had begun exploring options for a real retirement -- this will be the third time to retire from a job for me -- we didn't know what God was going to do. But we have been convinced for several months that He was getting ready to make some big changes in our lives.

But at the first of July the Lord opened the door of opportunity for us in the International Baptist Church in San Jose, Costa Rica. In a quick trip there the first week end of July, the pastor, Bro. Paul Dreessen and his wife Dina, graciously hosted me and offered us the opportunity to come help them in ministry with the church. The IBC church there is a strong congregation of over 350 people with beautiful facilities of its own on the western side of the capital of San Jose. In barely twelve hours after arriving we had found a nice, affordable apartment to lease in the town of Santa Ana, just two doors down from the pastor and his family. Our apartment is less than ten minutes from the church, and is very convenient to stores, public transportation etc. Over these past fifty four years of ministry, I have made many decisions to move a new direction in ministry. Few of them have been as clear and plain in God's leadership as this one. Thus we look forward with excitement toward this new adventure in God's will for us.



What will we be doing in Costa Rica? The pastor asked us to consider helping the church strengthen its outreach to older adults -- called Senior Adults in American English -- who are living in retirement within driving distance of the church. Already a core group of 35 to 40 such folks are in the church as the foundation of this ministry. But within a thirty minute drive of the church some 13,000 plus retired citizens of the US live permanently there. Add to this the large number of Canadians and Europeans living in retirement on the western side of San Jose and nearly 20,000 retired folks are potential ministry opportunity for the church. And these numbers are growing rapidly on a daily basis. The Costa Rican government just this spring passed new legislation designed to dramatically increase the attractiveness of Costa Rica to retired folks from North America and Europe in particular.³ Additionally within that thirty minute drive



³A phenomena is taking shape in central America, especially in Costa Rica and Panama, where rapidly growing numbers of retired people from North America and Europe are moving there to live permanently in large numbers. The cost of living is dramatically lower than in ether Europe or North America, averaging from 50 to 70 per cent less. The health care services are some of the best in the world -- better than in the US and in most of Europe -- and cost a fraction of what they do in Germany. The climate in the Central Valley of Costa Rica where we will be living averages 21 degrees Celsius year around, and ranges only from 15 to 28 degrees.

to the church are over a 100,000 English speaking individuals. With the close ties that Costa Rica has to the English speaking world, especially to North America, these numbers of people will continue to increase over the foreseeable future. The ministry of the International Baptist Church there is significant, and the potential for the church to continue its rapid growth is enormous.

Bro. Paul has a vision for the church to become even more a leading Baptist church in the country. Already it is looked upon as one of the most influential Protestant churches in all of Costa Rica. Baptists in Costa Rica are growing rapidly, and the IBC church, although English language, reaches out to the Spanish speaking Baptist pastors and churches with special programs and training opportunities. The pastor wants me to assist in developing more programs, especially Bible training seminars, for these pastors. We are looking forward to seeing what God has in store for us there.

Our prayer to God for our retirement years has been over the years that God would find ways of using us during these years while our health was good enough to be active in ministry. At nearly 69 years of age for me, this door of ministry opportunity has opened to us to live in real retirement without the stresses and pressures of a full time job and yet still be actively involved in ministry on a volunteer basis.

What does all this have to do with you? The sermon text today speaks volumes about God's calling to service in the Kingdom of Heaven. I want quickly to summarize two short points from the scripture passage.

BODY

I. Jesus' call, vv. 16-17

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

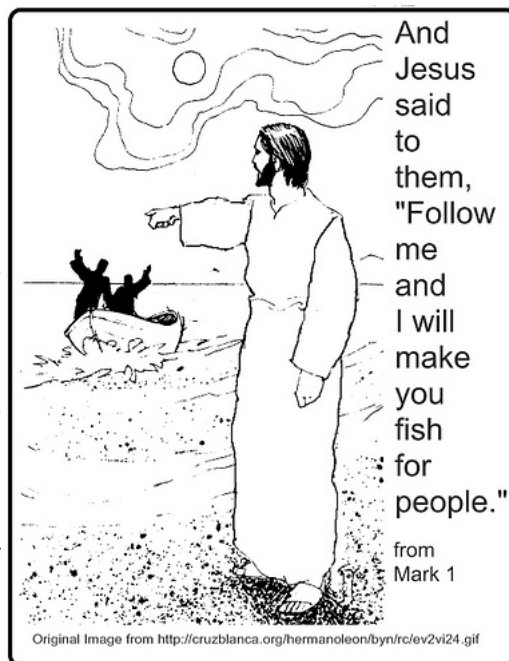
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When one reads this narrative the thing that stands out is the brevity and forcefulness of Jesus' call to these four fishermen. When he came upon them along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Mark says simply that Jesus said to them, "Follow me" (Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου). This admonition was followed by the simple promise, "and I will make you fish for people" (καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων). Nothing elaborate; very simple in its details. These four men, who had fished the Sea of Galilee all of their lives to this point, were now to go after people for the Kingdom of God. This calling took place sometime in AD 27. Peter would follow this calling until his martyrdom in the mid 60s, over 35 years. John would serve until his death in the mid 90s, some 60 years later. James would be the first Christian martyr from the apostles in the early 40s. Their lives were going to be uprooted and changed forever by this calling of Jesus. Each of these four men would find a distinctive place of ministry in the beginning years of Christianity. Each would travel to widely different parts of the Mediterranean world in ministry before their death. But the day Jesus came by their boats in Galilee changed them forever. It meant the beginning of a wonderful adventure of ministry.

This is what following Jesus has meant to Claire and me. I suspect that those of you who have been Christians for many years could share a similar testimony. So many of you have left your homeland to migrate to Germany from other parts of the world. As a child you probably never dreamed of being where you are today. From all over the world God has brought this congregation together with such diversity of background and heritage.

I want to challenge you with all the urgency possible to continue following Jesus. For the time being He has planted your life in the IBC church of Cologne. Follow Him faithfully here while you're living in Cologne. Some of you will move on to other places inside and outside Germany in future days. The call of Jesus re-

The beaches of both the Pacific and Caribbean oceans are less than two hours drive from us. A range of snow covered mountains surrounds us in the central part of the country with elevations reaching 4,800 meters. Within an hour's drive of our apartment is a rain forest with unbelievable varieties of plants and animals. Crime and violence are very low in the country; and Costa Rica has no standing army of its own. Over 90 per cent of the population are literate, and about this many have high speed connection to the internet. Costa Rica is rapidly becoming a high tech center for all of Latin America. The country has one of the lowest rates of environmental pollution of any country in the world, and is rapidly becoming a completely 'green country' environmentally.



mains the same: "Follow me." Be faithful to do this.

The promise of Jesus to these four fishermen was that they would impact the lives of people for the Kingdom of God. That impact was conditioned upon their faithfully following Christ wherever He would lead them. And impact the world they did in wonderful ways.

The opportunity Christ gives you in His call remains the same: follow Him and you will make a difference in the lives of other people. Each one of us has this promise from the Lord. Each one of us can be a positive influence for Christ in the lives of others. If we follow Him faithfully!

II. The response, vv. 18-20

18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

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One thing that deeply impresses me about this text is the way these four men responded to Jesus' call. Of Peter and Andrew, Mark says, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him" (καὶ εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ.). They didn't hesitate; they didn't argue or debate about whether or not to go. They just went. And in going they left their lives as fishermen behind them. With James and John, Mark asserts a deeper commitment even, "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him" (καὶ ἀφέντες τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν Ζεβεδαῖον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ.). Mark highlights that these two brothers left their father in order to follow Jesus. Obeying Jesus' call meant putting Him ahead of one's family. I suspect that Zebedee had many ambitions for these two boys to one day take over this very lucrative fishing business. But to his credit, he did not stand in the way of these two sons leaving all this behind in order to follow Jesus.

Responding to Jesus' call to follow Him is a step of faith. We don't know where it will take us; we have little idea of what it will involve. But planning out the future of our lives belongs to God and not to us. God knows exactly what is going to happen. And we can be absolutely certain that the direction our lives take in following Jesus will be the very best thing that could happen to us. We must trust Jesus unconditionally to lead us when we commit to Him.

These four brothers did exactly that and God blessed them wonderfully. To be sure there would be a few times when the temptation to waver in their commitment arose. But in spite of this they remained true to their calling from Christ.

I challenge you to step out in faith today and follow Christ in your lives. He will do for you what He did for these four Jewish fishermen in Galilee centuries ago: take you on a marvelous adventure serving Almighty God and making a real difference in this world. I know this is true out of my own experience of over half a century of gospel ministry.

CONCLUSION

"Follow me," says Jesus. What about it? Do it today! Step out in faith commitment to Jesus Christ, and never look back. God will make a huge difference for the good in your life, and through your life, if you do.

