



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Follow me!

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Jesus has a quiet authority that persuades us to follow him—and which makes something wonderful of our lives when we do.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:12-23

Our scripture lesson today comes from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 4 verses 12 to 23.

Starting at verse 12:

When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee.

He left Nazareth behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
along the sea road, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles!
The people who live in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those living in the shadowland of death,
light has dawned.

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!”

As He was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen.

“Follow Me,” He told them, “and I will make you fish for people!”

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.

Jesus was going all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

...May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

...I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

There are flight patterns around our world that certain birds follow to fly to warmer climates for the winter and back north in the summer. These birds migrate (change location) to find better sources of food and a climate where they will be more comfortable.

Have you noticed that some birds are in your area at a certain time of year and are gone at other times of the year?

Wild geese are especially interesting to watch because they fly in a V formation. They fly in the shape of a V because there is less wind resistance and they can fly faster and with greater ease. The goose flying at the front point of the V receives the most wind and has the most difficult time flying. When that goose gets tired another goose comes and takes its place and other geese take turns as well.

When it is time to migrate the flock leaves all at once. No one knows exactly what tells them it is time to leave, but when the time is right, they go.

There is a story in the Bible about four men who knew it was time to go. They were all fishermen and were working by the sea. They knew it was time to go because Jesus called to them and said, "**Come after me**" (Matthew 4:19). Immediately these men, Peter and Andrew, and James and John left their nets and their boats and "followed him" (Matthew 4:22).

These men, who followed Jesus, became his disciples. A disciple is like a student and these men wanted to study and learn from Jesus so they could serve others. They didn't question if the time was right to go, they knew they had been called by God.

Even today we can listen for that voice inside of us that helps us learn the ways of Jesus so we are able to go out into the world and serve others.

Some people have something special. Something that commands respect! They light up a room. People notice them. People gravitate toward them. People want to be in their company.

Sometimes these special people are good looking, but sometimes not. Sometimes they are vivacious—full of life—electric—but sometimes not. Sometimes they are intellectually brilliant, but sometimes

not. We find it difficult to put our finger on the elusive something that makes these people special. Perhaps the best we can say is that we know it when we see it.

Stephen Ambrose wrote the book, *Band of Brothers*, the story of Easy Company fighting their way through Europe during World War II. HBO made a mini-series of it, so you may have seen it. The book is not a novel—it's not fiction. It's the true story of real men in a terrible time and place. It's a story of ordinary men, some of whom become larger than life in the cauldron of war.

Easy Company wasn't large. Something over a hundred men! It was a small band of brothers that produced an uncommon number of heroes. The central figure in the book was one of those heroes—Dick Winters—a 2nd Lieutenant at the beginning of the war and a Major at its end. Winters was one of those special people to whom others naturally look for leadership. He was competent. He was brave. But there was something more—something hard to define. A kind of strength! A kind of honesty! A kind of wisdom!

One of the Easy Company men, Robert Smith, made a career of the Army and served with the Special Forces. Smith worked around brave, tough men all his life. Many years after the war, he wrote to Winters. He told Winters:

"You were blessed...with the uniform respect and admiration of 120 soldiers, essentially civilians in uniform, who would have followed you to certain death. I've been a soldier most of my adult life. In that time I've met only a handful of great soldiers." Here he tells Winters that Winters was one of those great soldiers. Then he says, "The rest of us were O.K.—good soldiers by-and-large, and a few were better than average, but I know as much about 'Grace Under Pressure' as most men, and a lot more about it than some. You had it."...(found in *Band of Brothers*, page 300).

Ambrose, the author of *Band of Brothers*, visited Winters in his home. He said of Winters, "He is...the gentlest of men." Ambrose tells of seeing a goose with a broken wing. He suggested to Winters that he shoot the goose and put it in the freezer. Winters gave him an astonished glance. "I couldn't do that!" he said.

Ambrose says, "He is incapable of a violent action, he never raises his voice, he is contemptuous of exaggeration.... He has achieved exactly what he wanted in life, that peace and quiet he promised himself as he lay down to catch some sleep on the night of (D-Day), and the continuing love and respect of the men he commanded in Easy Company...." ...(found in *Band of Brothers*, page 307).

My intent in telling Winters' story is not to make a hero of him. He is already a hero—has long since been a hero—and Ambrose, a great story-teller has already told his story. My intent is simply to illustrate the fact that some people have a gift—a special something that commands respect—that draws people—that inspires trust. Winters had it. You know some people like that—not many—in a lifetime we meet only a few.

We see that same kind of thing at work in our Gospel lesson today. As Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, he sees two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew—fishermen busily casting a net into the sea. He says to them, "**Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men**" -- (verse 19 of our scripture lesson today). Immediately they leave their nets to follow him. *Immediately*, Matthew tells us! *Immediately* Peter and Andrew leave their nets to follow Jesus!

Then Jesus sees two more brothers, James and John. They are also fishermen. James and John are not alone in their boat. Their father, Zebedee, is with them. They are working hard to mend their nets—an essential task. Jesus calls them to follow him—that is, he calls James and John. He does not call their father. *Immediately*, Matthew tells us again—*immediately*, they leave their boat, and they leave their father, and they follow Jesus.

Notice what Jesus says in his call to these four men—to these two sets of brothers. Note the appeal that he makes:

- -- Jesus does not say, "Follow me, and I will save your souls."
- -- He does not say, "Follow me, and I will make you rich."
- -- He does not say, "Follow me, and I will make you popular."
- -- Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers for men."

In other words, Jesus does not tell these men what they can get. He tells them what they give. Madison Avenue could learn from Jesus. So much advertising appeals to our greed—our lust—our selfishness. Jesus appeals to something deeper—something higher—something better. Jesus appeals to that part of us that wants to do something worthwhile—that seeks meaning in our lives—that is willing to sacrifice in the service of something important. So Jesus says to these disciple-candidates, "Follow me, and I will help you to help others"—and they follow. *Immediately*, Matthew tells us! *immediately* they follow him. *Immediately* Peter and Andrew—James and John—leave their fishing boats behind to follow Jesus—leave everything that's familiar to follow Jesus.

Oh, how I would love to have been there! How I would love to have seen Jesus in the flesh! How I would love to have had the opportunity to sit at his feet! How I would love to have experienced whatever it was that drew people to Jesus—that commanded their respect—that inspired their trust.

But, on the other hand, I've seen Jesus through the eyes of faith. I've had the opportunity to sit at his feet and to learn from him. I've experienced something in Jesus that draws me to him—that commands my respect—and inspires my trust.

And I am not alone. Hardly alone! All over the world, in places that Jesus never set foot, people are following him—worshiping him—learning from him—loving him. It's amazing, really! I read about a man who was arrested by the Chinese government for smuggling Bibles from Hong Kong into China.

That took place some years ago, during the Cultural Revolution—when the Chinese government was almost unimaginably oppressive. Can you imagine what courage it took to smuggle Bibles into China at that time—to risk imprisonment in a Chinese jail—to risk torture—to risk death!

But all over China, invisible to most people—invisible by design, because that was the only way they could survive—all over China little house-churches kept the name of Jesus alive in a Jesus-hating place. All over China, people heard Jesus' call to follow, and they followed. Jesus had not been with us in the flesh for two thousand years, but the Jesus whom the scriptures revealed was so powerful that he commanded respect and inspired trust even in China where believers risked torture and death for following Jesus.

After Mao died and the Cultural Revolution ended, a group of Americans visited Bishop K.H. Ting at the Nanjing Seminary. They asked the bishop how the church in China managed to grow during the Cultural Revolution—how the church came out of that troubled time with far more members than it had at the beginning. Bishop Ting answered simply, "By word of mouth: one Christian sharing the story with a single friend. That is how we grew in years of oppression."

I speak of China only because it is one example. The same is true in nations around the world—nations that are friendly to Jesus and nations that are not. People hear Jesus call, and they follow. They follow Jesus because they sense deep in their hearts that Jesus HAS something special—IS something special. There is something about Jesus and his call to love God and neighbor that commands respect—inspires trust. And so we follow Jesus. Thank God for Jesus!

Five hundred years ago, about the time that Columbus was discovering the New World, a Christian known as John of the Cross was sitting in a jail cell. John was a Spanish monk, and had been thrown in jail for because of his religious convictions. While sitting in that cell, he wrote poetry. The poetry which he wrote from that cell is so beautiful that people still read it today—five hundred years later. One of his poems has to do with following Jesus—following Jesus without question through thick and thin. Listen to what he says:

I am not moved, my God, -- to love you
By the heaven you have promised me. --
Neither does hell, so feared, move me
To keep me from offending you. --
You move me, Lord. -- I am moved -- seeing you
Scoffed at and nailed on a cross. --
I am moved -- seeing your body so wounded. --
Your injuries and your death move me. --
It is your love that moves me, -- and in such a way
That even though there were no heaven,
I would love you, --
And even though there were no hell,
I would fear you. --
You do not have to give me anything
so that I love you, --
For even if I didn't hope for what I hope, --
As I love you now, -- so would I love you.
-- (found in Madeleine L'Engle's book, *Two Part Invention*. Translated by L'Engle's friend, Dana)

All your life, you have been looking for someone you could really trust. Jesus is the one. He loves you. He calls you to love others in his name. If you will follow him, he will make something wonderful of your life. Love him; serve him; and see what he can do!

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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