

Being Before Doing

Matthew 4:12-23 (January 26, 2020)

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12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” 17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. 23Jesus 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.

Historical Context

While Matthew 4:12 says that Jesus “withdrew” to Galilee, Jesus’ move was more a journey into the lion’s den. Although the region that included Galilee and Capernaum had historically belonged to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, in the first century it truly was “Galilee of the Gentiles.” It has been conquered by Rome and was ruled by Herod Antipas, who was notorious for his brutality and intolerance of any who threatened his power. Into this context of danger and darkness and death comes Jesus, proclaiming deliverance and light and life.

Theme: Being Before Doing

There is a sense of calling that permeates this passage. There are different kinds of callings – to John the Baptist, to Jesus, and to the disciples, yet each is from God. Some people, however, have a hard time seeing a direct connection between what they do and what they believe, which is why they don’t feel called.

Maybe calling is less about what we do than who we are. God’s call isn’t simply to do something, but rather to be something, a child of God. Maybe being comes before doing. Maybe being even makes doing possible.

Is that what made it possible for John to proclaim the coming Messiah even when it meant his imprisonment? Is that what summoned such an immediate response from Peter and Andrew, James and John? They have no idea where they will go, or what they will do, but they do know that Jesus is calling them to be his disciples, and they trust that the rest will become clear in time.

Thus, if we are open to being God’s children, we will learn over time what it means and, indeed, find all kinds of things to do in response to God’s call.