

Why Follow Jesus?

It's decision time for Jesus. The one God called to prepare the way, His Cousin John, is imprisoned and would soon be martyred. John has done his job. Now Jesus must do His. Jesus moves to the other side of the Galilee region, leaving His hometown of Nazareth, never to return. He proceeds with His first task; gathering the men He needs to train.

Jesus goes to the Sea of Galilee and starts calling fishermen to follow Him. An interesting choice:

- Young men who know hard work, who know facing danger, who are brave and smart.
- Since only Peter is described as married, we can presume that these men are young, perhaps in their early 20s.
- Two sets of brothers respond to His call.
- They respond "immediately," leaving father and wife, family.

We'll come back to them. There's another group that comes to Him. People from all over come to Him for healing, Jews from Jerusalem in Judea, presumably non-Jews from outside of Israel, as far as Syria. Jesus begins His ministry showing His love and power to everyone and anyone. He is widely famous and honored. His healing has brought Him attention, people who want to hear what He has to say.

Then, there's the third group. Jesus goes to the synagogues to spread His message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- The Kingdom of heaven come to earth would be their long-expected Messiah
- But he would bring a call to drive out the Romans and restore the kingship of David.
- He would not be talking about repentance
- This message of repentance is not what they expect, not what they want to hear.
- They want political change, not spiritual change.
- Jesus is not so welcome here.

We understand why the synagogue Jews did not respond to His call. We understand why those He healed responded. But why did those fishermen respond? Why did they leave everything to follow Him, follow Him to a very unknown future?

We can imagine that these young men had heard Jesus' preaching.

- They were already intrigued.
- The Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts.
- They just needed the invitation.

- Young men. Mostly unattached.
- Happy to take up a different, challenging life.
- They want to make a difference in the world.
- They want their lives to matter.
- They want to be a part of something bigger.
- An adventure: “Let’s go, brother, and see what becomes of this.”

Now that raises the question for you and me: Why do I follow Jesus? For some people, especially in new mission situations, it is because of a miraculous healing or a vision or an answer to prayer. This is what indeed happens when God is proving that He is the real God. People experience Him as Lord and follow Him in gratitude and joy, many times at the cost of leaving family and friends and communities.

But that probably was not any of us. Why do we follow Him? It’s a question young people in our family have, our unchurched neighbors have, people of other religions around us have: Why do you follow Jesus? Why do you go to church? What do you get out of it? What am I missing? Why should I follow Him? What do you, would you, say?

Why do you believe? Why do you follow? Why do you join? Just because it is what I was always taught? What are you going to say when someone asks you, perhaps a family member asking sincerely, perhaps as an atheist as a mocking challenge?

What we say is what those first disciples said: we follow Jesus, we join His church, because we want to make a difference. We want to be part of something bigger, because we want our lives to matter. We want to be part of what Jesus did, just like those first disciples who heeded His call: We want to bring the message of salvation to all the world. We want to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, the kingdom of love and forgiveness and eternal joy.

We know that salvation has been won, for us and for all, by Jesus sacrifice on the cross and rising in victory over sin, death, and the devil. What greater cause can there be than the salvation of the world.

- God wants all to be saved, and we want to be part of that apostolic band that wants to get that good news out, in word and deed.
- We want to be part of that Kingdom work that Jesus started and handed on to His followers, spreading healing and freedom from oppression in the land.
- We have a Master to follow, One Who gave His life for us and for all.

We ask everybody else: Who is the Master of your life? Whom do you follow? Who is more worthy to follow than Jesus? What life is more worthy than following Him? Why do I follow

Jesus? He has called me in Holy Baptism, made me His own. What greater purpose and calling is there in life? I follow Him. I am one of His disciples.