

**“Jesus Is My Personal Savior In Church”**

Matthew 4:16 - 5:2  
Sermon on the Mount Series

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”*  
*Jeremiah 15:16*

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## Introduction

You may be wondering about the Sermon title – Jesus Is My Personal Savior In Church.

Of course, the first part of the title is very familiar.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the baptisms of three believers, in their written testimonies we had this phrase – Jesus Is My Personal Savior.

The phrase is a well-known hallmark, confession, for Evangelical Christians.

It is rooted, for example, in the story we have just heard.

Four “persons” are mentioned: Peter, Andrew, James and John

And these four have a significant personal encounter with Jesus

So attractive, they uproot normal priorities, vocation and family, and re-root them in their personal relationship with Jesus.

There is no doubt: Peter, Andrew, James and John could confess – Jesus is my personal savior!

These four met Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee some 2,000 years ago and responded to Jesus’ call, ***Come, follow me!*** and began a life-long personal relationship with Jesus.

This morning I want to ask you: where do we meet Jesus today and where do we have an ongoing in-depth relationship with Jesus today?

Matthew’s Gospel tell us who Jesus is and tells followers where and how to follow.

The Sermon on the Mount, which comes next in Matthew’s Gospel, and which we will be studying for the coming months, is given to the followers of Jesus as the “*followers manual*”. (Summary!)

In all our vocations manuals inform and guide the practitioners.

Teachers, mechanics, social workers, pastors, - all refer to vocational manuals developed to guide them in their professional work.

The Sermon on the Mount is the manual for Jesus followers. But where is the context, the workplace, for the followers to “absorb” the manual, to learn about following Jesus today?

## Text

This story of Jesus calling the fishermen and how this story fits with the larger Gospel account and especially how it relates to the Sermon on the Mount shows the way.

Look at how Matthew constructs his Gospel and the way Jesus acts.

Matthew chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 tell us ‘who’ Jesus is (necessary for listening to his sermon)

The Messiah – God with us - from the lineage of Abraham and David

Born of the Holy Spirit and Mary and destined to save his people

King of Jews

Baptizer of the Holy Spirit

Son of God – come from heaven as a man among us

Then in chapter 4 Jesus goes public, it is like a great light dawning in the land of darkness and he speaks his message:

**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand** (He is the King of the Kingdom and he is here!)

We are told who Jesus is and what Jesus says; and then we are told what he does.

He calls disciples.

Here is the flow of the narrative: Jesus is introduced – Messiah, Son of God; a summation of his message is reported – the kingdom of heaven; then, right before the keynote teaching of the Sermon on the Mount – the formation of his discipleship community begins.

The entire New Testament bears witness to this fact: Jesus acts in our world with and in and through the men, women and children he calls to be with him.

The story of Jesus calling the fishermen tells us about the community he forms which will then be the context, the workplace into which Jesus' Sermon will be directed.

The way Jesus forms this initial group of four disciples lays out key principles for his community.

Jesus initiates.

He is walking along the shore of the Lake, he sees the two fishermen and he calls out to them: **Come, follow me.** Be 'with' me. Live together with me.

In the ancient world to 'follow' a master; to be 'with' a master did not refer to a disciple's imitation of their teacher from a distance but rather to their being enabled; personality enhanced or transformed by another personality; by living 'with' the teacher (Talbert)

But transformation is a long narrow road and therefore what is critical is that Jesus initiates the relationship.

Oh, sometimes we hear: I have decided to follow Jesus.

And that is true as far as it goes. But we decide all kinds of things in life and then quite easily change our mind and decide otherwise.

With Jesus, he decides then we decide. He initiates. Why is this important?

I think it can be summed up in something the Bible says (Rom. 11:29)

**. . . for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

When Jesus calls us, he will never, for an eternity, let us go. What this means is that in the most challenging moments as a Christian,

and there will be challenging moments when we say, that's it, I have had enough, I cannot go on, I do not want to go on, as a Christian.

In that place, Jesus will invite us to lean on him and bear his yoke; he will see us through. He will guide, protect, preserve and bring us to completion in his kingdom.

The community of Jesus is formed where Jesus initiates.

Jesus is irresistible.

What are we being told in the story when Peter and Andrew **at once left their nets and followed him**? When James and John **immediately left the boat and their father and followed him**?

What was irresistible? What do the nets and the boat represent?

Their livelihood, their vocation, what came natural to them to provide for themselves, their family, their friends; to be fulfilled; to have the best in life; to be identified!

What does their father represent? The tribe they belong to. The natural human relationships necessary for the best in life. To be identified!

Now when we check out the rest of the story we discover these fishermen kept hold of their boats and nets. We discover they kept hold of their mothers, fathers, wives and children.

But their action here and their subsequent behavior tells us they took what was natural to them, what was the best in life, what was their identity, and rooted it into Jesus.

Why would they do this? Intuition - that Jesus is from heaven, even God come to earth!

It is like the story Jesus told about a pearl merchant discovering one great invaluable pearl; he sold everything he possessed to gain that pearl.

When it comes down to it, it is better to be with Jesus than to work a vocation which sustains our life. He will sustain our life. It is better to be with Jesus than to be with family and friends. He will provide a completely satisfying identity for us

To respond to the call of Jesus to come and follow means I have discovered in life someone so good to be with, if it comes to it, I can let go of everything else: relationships, stuff, my very life.

What this means, with the Sermon on the Mount, is that the way of Jesus is supremely better than any other way. Remember this when we get into the nitty gritty of the Sermon!

Jesus initiates – **Come, follow me.** Jesus is irresistible – **immediately they left and followed.**

Finally, Jesus includes – **I will send you out to fish for people.**

Jesus is on a mission and Jesus only calls people to follow to include them in his mission.

Jesus does not call us to sit around and enjoy his presence – though we certainly do.

Jesus does not call us to study everything he says and does – though we certainly do.

Jesus does not call us to have an excellent life through his virtues – though we certainly do.

Jesus calls us to follow and be included in his mission.

Being with Jesus is being constantly on the alert for men, women and children whom Jesus appears to be calling, to get them into the boat. Jesus cannot return and fully establish his kingdom until every last fish is in the boat.

Jesus initiates, Jesus is irresistible, Jesus includes.

This is what Jesus does in forming what will be the Church and it is the context of Church for whom the Sermon on the Mount is spoken so that the crowds can be healed.

The Sermon on the Mount serves to form the disciples to be with Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount constructs out of the individual disciples the community of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount is heard and worked into the disciple's life when it is practiced among the disciples committed to being together with Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount creates the Church.

When Jesus saves a person he automatically brings them into the Church to be formed in his life.

Where do we **follow** Jesus today?

Here is Martin Luther (Oct. 31, 1517 – the 95 Thesis):

Therefore he who would find Christ must first find the Church. How should we know where Christ and his faith were, if we did not know where his believers are? And he who would know anything of Christ must not trust himself nor build a bridge to heaven by his own reason; but he must go to the Church, attend and ask her. Now the Church is not wood and stone, but the company of believing people; one must hold to them, and see how they believe, live and teach; they surely have Christ in their midst. For outside of the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation. (*Sermon for the Early Christmas Service: Luke 2:15-20 (1521-1522). Luther's Works*)

### Application

As we listen to, seek to understand, and apply the Sermon on the Mount, the context given by Jesus to accomplish this is the interpersonal relationship I have with Jesus and my fellow believers in the local congregation Jesus calls me to.

The Sermon comes alive when it operates to form Christian disciples in a local congregation.

To apply this, I believe we face one major obstacle.

It is not natural to be made family with strangers and we do not like what is unnatural.

Peter and Andrew probably liked James and John; rivals perhaps, but at least they were fishermen. But what about Matthew the tax collector, Judas the traitor, doubting Thomas and the rest who came later?

Are we naturally drawn to other Christians? Do we like them? Depends on defining "like".

To begin with we certainly have problems with other Christians in Whitehorse – they simply have some basic theology wrong, so serious that we cannot meet with them. (they – same way!)

We then bring this discernment into our own circle

I like the right kind of worship music. From my perspective, music that is not worshipful and barely musical, I don't think I'll sing along.

Then we make our discernment more personal. I used to like that person but then they hurt me. I don't talk to them anymore. In fact, I had to move to the other side of the church sanctuary to avoid them. If it gets any worse I will leave and go somewhere else.

It's natural to have my friends in my small group – it is what I like, you know, the people who look like me, who think like me, who work like me, who recreate like me.

I'm not kidding. This all goes on at RBC.

And our experience of being with Christ is diminished.

Relationship with the other disciples is not natural. In fact, relationship with the other disciples is only possible when Jesus is among us.

And I can only fully understand and follow Jesus when I do so in harmony with the other disciples. Jesus is so much more than my natural ability to comprehend.

I need the multiple perspectives and understanding of those unlike me to follow Jesus.

At the root of our challenge is what we believe about the Church. How, practically, does Church – not some invisible Church, but my local Church - relate me to Jesus Christ?

I challenge you to think seriously about this. I challenge you to think about what happened when Jesus said to Peter, Andrew, James and John – Come, follow me – and immediately they left all and together followed. Amen.