



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for March 2, 2022 (Ash Wed.)**  
**“Lay Down Your Reputation”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-17**

### **Mark 1:16-20**

*As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.*

*When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

### **Mark 2:13-17**

*Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

*While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

*On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

### **Lay It Down**

Welcome to Ash Wednesday Service and with it we begin the grand season of Lent. For centuries, the church has set aside the forty days prior to Easter, minus the Sundays, as a time of sacrifice and penitence. It is customary for persons to give something up during Lent. Historically, Lent has always been a time when new converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism.

During Lent, we talk about the basics of our faith which includes, first and foremost, the cross and its impact upon our lives. During Lent, we also pause to consider what it means to be a disciple.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, talks about discipleship and the costs that come along with it. He also talks about what he calls, “cheap grace.”

“Cheap grace,” he says, “is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

*Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*"

During the season of Lent, we will be focusing on such things. The theme for the upcoming sermons during Lent will focus on what it means to, "*lay it down*" for the surpassing worth of following Christ. "*Laying it down*," whatever that might be, is a great theme for the season of Lent, and an even better one for the whole of life.

The words of Christ from Mark 8:34-35 will form the foundation for what we will be talking about.

*"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."* (Mark 8:34-35)

### **Come and Follow Me**

Tonight, we will be taking a close look at the decision made by four fishermen to follow Jesus. Jesus offered the invitation to follow him while the four were fishing along the Sea of Galilee.

*"Follow me,"* he said, *"and I will make you fish for people."*

Immediately the four "*laid down*" their nets and followed him.

Peter and his brother, Andrew were common fishermen. They toiled along the Sea of Galilee trying to scratch out a living. James and his brother, John were a part of a much bigger operation. The scripture not only mentions their father, but the hired servants they had to help them. If they were fishing today they very well may have been known as the Zebedee Fish Company, LLC.

Jesus invited all four to leave everything they knew in the rearview mirror. He called them to strike out into the unknown. In a word, the four laid down a whole lot more than their nets. Whatever hopes and dreams they had, were put to the side, all for the sake of the Kingdom.

### **Worth the Investment**

I am of the mind that these four fishermen had built a pretty good reputation. I'm sure that most viewed them as hardworking and dependable. Jesus saw so much more. He knew there was something about them that was special. Jesus saw their potential. He knew they would be worth pouring into. His investment in them would prove to be well-founded. Eventually, they would lead a Kingdom movement.

There is an important word there for each of us. Jesus believes in ordinary persons just like you and me. He wants to pour into us. We too have tremendous potential to lead a Kingdom movement.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "*God must love common people, he made so many of them.*"

Jesus must have thought, "*If these guys would just give themselves to me, together, we will change the world.*"

The same holds true for us.

## **A Brand-New Identity**

Peter and Andrew, James and John had more to lay down than just their nets. During Christ's day, the two primary means of social status was one's work and one's family. In that regard, things are not a whole lot different today. In fact, in meeting someone for the first time we will often ask, "*What do you do for a living?*" as if that's the sum of a person's life. We will even ask about a person's family. That's always a great way to take an interest in a person.

For the four, they had to lay aside both their work and their families for the sake of following Christ. Their reputations, which had all along had been wrapped up with life's work and tied to their families, would now find expression in following Jesus.

## **I Surrender All**

William Barclay writes, "*A man should never think so much of what he is as of what Jesus Christ can make him.*"

When it comes to following Jesus far too many think they are doing him a big favor. "*Hey Jesus, look at what I have to offer. It's your lucky day.*"

When it comes to following Jesus, we come empty handed. We come without any pretense. We are at Christ's disposal, however that might play out. That's what it means to "*deny yourself and take up your cross and follow him.*"

I love what the old hymn says, "*All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give; I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*"

## **Laying Down a Reputation of a Different Sort**

In a story of like kind, just one chapter removed from our story for today, we find Levi the tax collector also being called to follow. Levi's reputation was much different from the four fishermen. He was a dastardly tax collector, a cheat, and a swindler. He was hated by all, and yet Jesus called him. Just like the fishermen, Levi left what he was doing and followed Christ.

Levi laid down his reputation as well, only his was one of greed and deceit. He had to walk away from the error of his ways to follow as Jesus wanted him to. "*And he got up and followed him,*" the scripture says in Mark 2:14.

Levi is counted among the number of those who "*denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed him.*"

## **What Matters is Christ's Reputation**

What we are talking about here this evening cuts to the core of what it means to be a disciple. It strikes to the very center of what it means to be in relationship with Jesus.

All of us have nurtured our reputations over the years. Some are known for their kindness and compassion. Others are known for their intellect. Still others are known for being the life of the party. Some are even known by reputation for things that less than becoming. Theirs is not a good account at all.

When Christ comes calling our reputations, for good or for bad, matter very little.

What matters most is Christ's reputation.

- That when people see us, they see Christ working in us.
- That when we go about our daily lives, they see us doing what Christ wants done.
- That we are counted among those willing to decrease so Christ might increase.
- That he gains the glory, not us.

This was what was asked of the four fishermen along the Sea of Galilee. It was also asked of Levi the tax collector. It was asked of the twelve disciples and every other disciple who has come after them, including us.

What was asked of them is asked of us. *“Deny yourself,”* even your long-guarded reputation. *“Take up your cross and follow Christ.”*