

Matthew 4:12-23
January 22, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the best book's I have ever read is *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, by John Boyne. It's a fictional story told from the vantage point of a 9-year old boy, Bruno, whose father is a Commander in the German Army during the reign of Hitler. Bruno's family has to move from their 5 floor home in Berlin, the fine Café's surrounding it, and their friends to a much smaller home in the middle of a forest. It doesn't take long for Bruno to realize he has no neighbors to replace the sorrow and loneliness of missing his 3 best friends back in Berlin. One day, as Bruno peers through the window in his bedroom, he notices that beyond the valley and in the distance stand what appear to be small buildings and people. In fact, a lot of people all dressed in striped pajamas on the other side of a rather tall fence. He longs to explore the wilderness around his home and perhaps venture to this far off village. Surely, there has to be boys his age there to play with; however, his father has forbid he and his sister from going anywhere near this place and should they do so the consequences will be swift and harsh. However, Bruno's curiosity eventually outweighs his fear and his explorations lead him to the fence where sitting on the other side in a remote section outside the careful watch of German guards is a young boy named Shmuel dressed in striped pajamas. Quickly, the boys become friends and Bruno returns day after day. Although they can't play like most young boys do they talk and talk. Though separated by a fence they become best friends and Bruno

forgets his friends from Berlin and the comforts of home. A close relationship forms and Bruno's life is changed forever.

Something deep inside of Bruno moved him to overcome the fear of his father and of being punished for going to the place he was forbidden to go. He was told those people whom he thought he saw were really not people at all. They were just nothing but Bruno sensed differently and he followed whatever it was inside that told him different. And in seeking he discovered that in fact those nothings were something. The boy he met was like him in so many ways – even sharing the exact same birth date.

In our text today Jesus calls his first disciples – Simon (Peter), his brother Andrew and two more brothers James and John. He calls as they go about their normal daily routines as fishermen stating, “Follow me!” And they do! They seemingly leave everything behind – their jobs and families - and follow Jesus. Where are they going? What will they do? How will they live? Our text does not give us those answers other than the fact that Jesus says; “I will make you fish for people.”

Jesus' four new followers don't ask any questions or if they do we are not given insight into them. But instead they simply follow somehow trusting and knowing Jesus will provide for their needs and will equip them in their new vocations. “Follow me!” It seems so easy but yet it is so very difficult. These first disciples make it look so easy; yet, we know it isn't and of course it didn't take long for them to experience some hurdles along the way. There will be moments they

ask questions of who Jesus is, how he does His miracles, why He must talk about dying, and even the first disciple Simon (Peter) will deny knowing Him three times. And Jesus knows this. He predicts Peter's denials. He is fully aware another soon to be disciple will in time betray him and hand him over to Roman authorities. He knows they will question who He is even though they see and hear all He does. Yet, he still calls them - to follow. He calls these ordinary, everyday fishermen out of their ordinary, everyday lives and jobs and invites them into actively participating with Him. They will at times disappoint him, frustrate him, and fail to follow but Jesus is unrelenting in his efforts to equip and use them to continue the message of God's reconciling work in the world once Jesus has departed them following his death, resurrection, and ascension. They will become fishers of people. Despite all their mistakes, doubts, flaws, etc. they do in fact give witness to all they have seen, they do baptize, they do teach, and they continue to be active participants in God's kingdom as they usher in Christ's church aided by the Holy Spirit's guidance. Through them and so many other faithful followers Christ's church begins to grow. Are there challenges along the way? Of course. There will be constant struggles between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians over such things as whether or not one needs to be circumcised or not. Or whether one needs to follow Jewish dietary laws or not. There will be divisions over things such as church unity and who is welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper. There will be confrontations over church doctrine, creeds, and of course the Apostle Paul's writings that proclaim we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. If this is the case, what about good

works? What about the law? Yet, despite all this somehow the Holy Spirit continued to be at work and Christ's church survives. The call to "follow me" from Jesus still beckons.

But that call just isn't as easy as our childhood memories of "follow the leader." Just jump in line and off one went. There really wasn't anything else to it. Yet a lifetime journey with Jesus is met with its ups and downs. There are so many things that hamper our ability to heed the words of Jesus, "Follow me!" Things get in our way that seem more important – homework, sporting events, or jobs. Perhaps it's fear, anger, or jealousy. Perhaps we don't agree with a particular decision made at church and instead of continuing to hear the call to "follow" we instead are consumed by the voices that call out saying, "You don't need them. Go it alone. Or the grass is greener somewhere else." Or perhaps Jesus calls us to serve in a capacity we have never thought of before – teacher, council member, reader, greeter, volunteer at a local pantry, etc. Quickly, our self-centered hearts and minds begin to ask questions and look for reasons we can't. Generally, those stem from fear. A fear of trying something new we may not be comfortable with, or feel we are unqualified to do. It may be the fear of having to give something up in order to meet the expectations of what Jesus is calling us to.

Despite all this, the fact remains Jesus continues to call us to follow. Each and every Sunday we come he equips us, feeds us, and strengthens us to move beyond our fears and respond to God's abundant grace to go out and proclaim the amazing good news that through Christ, God has conquered death. Through Christ, God has

come near. Through Christ, God has reconciled the world to Godself and that work of reconciliation continues to this day.

Perhaps, like the young boy Bruno, when we move beyond our fears and follow our heart we experience something that has been missing. We are opened up to a world we didn't know existed. We are able to break down the fences that separate us and see our neighbor for who they truly are setting all difference aside.. Reconciliation happens. God's kingdom draws near yet again. Amen.