

Follow – Matthew 4:18-23

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¹⁸ As 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 fishers. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As 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. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus^[a] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news^[b] of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Many of the world's leaders in government and industry were in Davos, Switzerland this past week for the World Economic Forum. This is an annual event that attracts some of the most powerful leaders from around the globe. Imagine all the power and ego that were on display among the hundreds or thousands of leaders who gathered there! They all have certainly led others in a variety of styles to large degrees of success.

When it comes to leadership styles, we've all heard of servant leadership, a philosophy where the leader prioritizes serving the needs, growth, and well-being of their team first, flipping traditional hierarchies by putting people before personal power, to foster empowered, trusting, and high-performing environments.

Developed by Robert K. Greenleaf, this servant leadership philosophy focuses on shared power, empathy, and empowering individuals so they can reach their full potential, ultimately benefiting those they lead through increased commitment and engagement.

The servant leader's primary motivation is to serve others, not to gain status. There's a sharing of power in this approach and a commitment of the leader to helping those they lead develop their skills and perform at their best.

In doing this, inclusive environments are created where people feel accepted and feel they can be authentic. The leader leads with a focus on the collective good, rather than personal gain. They lead from the bottom, supporting upwards; success is measured by the growth and achievement of the team.

Why this talk of servant leadership? Well, in Matthew 4, we hear of an action spurred by a servant leader we're very familiar with.

Jesus had gone to Galilee. He had left his home in Nazareth and, says Matthew, made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Why here? Matthew says Jesus chose this location in order to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had said: Here is where God's light will shine—in this place of darkness, the shadow of death. Galilee was a place largely made up of Gentiles, or non-Jews. And it was here that Jesus would reach out to those who were both accustomed and non-accustomed to faith.

Jesus doesn't stay in the comfort and security of the temple in order to call those he wanted to serve. He goes out and meets people where they are—in the busyness of their everyday working lives.

Jesus calls these fishermen to follow him. And they bizarrely do. They immediately leave their livelihoods, their families, what they've known up to this point as their way of life, and they follow Jesus.

Why?

There was no promise of financial gain. As far as we know, there was no guarantee of security for their spouses or children they would leave behind. There was from Jesus only a promise of what he would have them do: fish for people.

They immediately left their nets, got up out of their boats, and followed Jesus.

Something about this man's aura must have triggered this lasting allegiance, this willingness to leave everything behind and do the difficult work of telling others about him. What must it have been about Jesus?

Throughout scripture, we're given indicators of how Jesus behaved as a servant. He healed people, he fed people who were hungry, he famously bent down to wash the feet of his disciples in an act of great humility, and, of course, he died a martyr's death on a cross—all this not for the sake of himself but for all of humanity who he loved.

There are descriptions of Jesus others gave that confirm his servanthood, like Paul, who said Jesus didn't count equality with God as something to be grasped, but instead emptied himself in the form of a servant.

And Jesus himself, in his teachings, spoke of the value he placed in serving others when he said in Matthew 20, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant," even as he, he said, "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Maybe this is what spawned these disciples' allegiance on this day, this willingness to get up and go. Maybe they sensed his character as one of service and love for them and everyone, a character and identity they had no problem starting a new life for.

Following Jesus is easy, or at least becomes easier, when we sense this is a leader who wants what's best for us and is willing to sacrifice for us to ensure our well-being.

We treasure leaders like this, not only this one that we worship as savior, but the leaders in our daily lives who inspire trust and who demonstrate that our well-being and contributions matter, who make it not all about them but the people they are serving.

We're only about a month into 2026. And so even as this year is still just getting started, it's worth pondering who we will follow this year: who we'll work for, who we'll vote for, who we'll learn from in our classrooms, who we will turn to for spiritual guidance, who we'll trust with our finances, our health, and our family's well-being.

Who are those who lead from the front, only with regard to themselves? And who are those who lead from behind, to ensure all they lead are found in concern?

I want to tell you a story about Jacob the Baker, from a book called *Jacob's Journey*, by Noah benShea:

On his travels, Jacob the Baker encounters an old woman along a forest path and asks for her help in navigating this unfamiliar road. She questions why he would ask an old and lonely woman for help, fearing that she has no assistance to give him.

"Fear," said Jacob, turning back to the woman, "fear makes us not only less than we might be but less than we think we are.

Faith reminds us we should doubt our fears."

Jacob motioned to the path ahead of them. "Perhaps we can lean on each other for a while."

The woman laughed out loud. "How can I be a support to you?"

"Ah, that is not so difficult," said Jacob. "You see, the difference between a Tower of Babel and a tower of strength is the difference between those who live to make themselves more and those who know the way to heaven is in making others more."

--Noah benShea, *Jacob's Journey* (New York: Villard Books, 1991), 37.

That's servanthood; that's servant leadership, Jesus' kind of leadership, the kind that merits our attention and, in Jesus' case, the kind that merits our allegiance.

At the end of Albert Schweitzer's book "The Quest for the Historical Jesus" Schweitzer writes these words: "He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside. He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands, and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal Himself in the toil, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."

As we follow Jesus or any other servant leader, we learn in our own experience who they are—those who don't make *themselves* more but instead first make *others* more.

And I think that's who we'd prefer to follow.

