

Like some of you, I’ve moved around a lot in my life. I lived outside of Boston for 10 years. Other than that, I have never lived anywhere for more than five years. I’ve moved so much I have the process down. Part of that process is to evaluate each of my possessions and decide if I’m going to take it or leave it.

Many of you have been through this. You lived in a house for decades. When it came time to move into a retirement home or an assisted living facility, you were forced to downsize. It’s not easy. We hold on to things, because we have emotional attachments to them.

Each time I move, I go through all my books and discard as many as I can bear to let go. It’s hard because they’re like old friends and conversation partners. I have a wooden toybox with my name on it. My grandfather made it over 50 years ago. The last thing I need, at my age, is a toybox, but I can’t get rid of that thing. It’s my connection to Grumpa, whom I loved dearly.

We all know we can’t have it all. When an opportunity arises such as a job promotion, getting married and starting a new life, finding a home that is manageable, or just getting a fresh start, any of these things might require leaving friends, routines, or a familiar community. Our happiness and fulfillment are largely dependent on our ability to leave things behind.

That was the case with the fishermen in our story today. One day, Jesus appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He called out to a couple fisherman, Peter and Andrew, saying, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” He went a little farther and called to James and John.

Allow me to give you a little background to highlight how amazing and unexpected this invitation from Jesus was. I once saw a video produced by a pastor and author by the name of Rob Bell. He provides background to this story. This was new to me, but I think it helps to make sense of it.

Bell described that, in those days, Rabbis competed for followers. Rabbis wanted the best and most promising disciples. These are the people that will carry on the rabbi’s teachings. If their disciples were successful and influential, that reflected well on the Rabbi.

Therefore, rabbis chose the brightest and the best. If you wanted to study with a particular Rabbi, you had to prove yourself. There were perspective disciples that would memorize large chunks of the Hebrew Bible. They would dedicate their lives to God and prayer and studying the Law of Moses.

It was a competitive environment, in a way, something like college admissions today. Every college wants the smartest, most promising students they can get. And students compete to get into the best schools. The way Bell describes it, Rabbis wouldn’t accept just anybody. Every rabbi wanted the best of the best.

With that as background, the invitation from Jesus takes on new meaning. Why were Peter, Andrew, James, and John fishing? Nobody chose them. They weren’t elite scholars. They weren’t the best of the best. Therefore, they entered into what was probably the family trade. Cicero was a first-century Roman statesman. In his ranking of occupations, fishermen ranked dead last. Maybe that’s why Jesus didn’t have to ask twice. It wasn’t that Jesus made them a great offer. It may have been their only offer.

I think that’s one of the beautiful things about Jesus. The invitation to follow him is not a competition. There’s no experience required. You don’t have to be the best of the best at anything. Coincidentally, that’s the same message the nominations committee, here at the church, wants us to know.

Every year, they make invitations to our members and friends to serve on committees and boards. Sometimes those invitations are accepted with enthusiasm. Sometimes folks will assume their lack of familiarity or knowledge on a subject should disqualify them. “Not so!,” says the Nominations Committee.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John knew a lot about sailing boats, mending nets, and cleaning fish. They probably knew nothing about fishing for people: preaching, casting out demons, and healing diseases, all things they would do. It’s not all about having the best skills and abilities. It’s about what God can do with whatever gifts we have.

After making that decision to follow Jesus, look at what they experienced. They accompanied Jesus as he cured every kind of disease and restored demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics. Their lives became an

adventure as Jesus sent them out to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. They listened to Jesus teach. Peter, James and John were on the mountain when Jesus was glorified, his clothes turned dazzling white, and God spoke to them directly.

Jesus invited these fishermen to a life of adventure and meaning and glory. The only question was will they be able to leave their old life behind? You've heard me say that when a Scripture passage provides a detail, that detail is usually pretty significant. The author of Matthew's Gospel identifies specific items that each of those fishermen left.

Immediately, Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus. Immediately, James and John left the boat and Zebedee, their father, and followed him. In other words, in order to embrace the amazing life Jesus offered, they left their boats, their nets, their work, their responsibilities, their family and they followed.

Here's a question. What do you need to leave behind in order to embrace the life God desires for you? What do you need to leave in order to follow Jesus? For those first disciples, following Jesus literally meant walking alongside him and learning from him.

For us, following Jesus means learning about him and studying his teachings. It means using Jesus as an example of how to live. He served humanity, so to follow him is to find ways to serve those in need. He aligned himself with the poor and the outcast. He freed people by healing them, practicing forgiveness, and showing mercy. He prayed regularly. To follow Jesus means to intentionally engage in all these things. In the words of the apostle Paul, it means to "take on the mind of Christ."

I've noticed there is a command people use with dogs these days. Particularly with puppies, it comes in handy. They say, "Leave it." The puppy starts messing with the cat...Leave it! Something falls from your plate that you don't want the dog to eat...Leave it! During a walk, the dog starts to chase a squirrel...Leave it!

It's not in the text, but my bet is if Peter, Andrew, James, and John put up some resistance to the invitation to follow, Jesus would've told them to leave it. "But fishing is all I know." Leave it. "But I have a lot invested in my nets." Leave it. "But my father expects me to take over the business." Leave it.

Is there something you need to leave behind? Realizing it might be hard to think about what you and I might have to leave behind in order to live the life God intends for us, I made a list. This is my list of things we might need to leave behind in order to experience the life of adventure and meaning that comes with following Jesus: destructive habits, guilt, shame, apathy, unrealistic expectations, a parent's expectations, self-righteousness, abusive behavior, an entitled mentality, a mind that is already made up, judgement of others, fear of failure, fear of succeeding, fear of conflict, fear in general, the compulsion to always be on our best behavior, the impulse to try to please everyone, and .grudges.

I'm a minister in the church Jesus established, because I believe there is nothing that leads to purpose, meaning, fulfillment, happiness, connection, joy, and glory like following in the way of Jesus. There is nothing more adventurous and rewarding than changing lives.

Therefore, if there is something holding you back from following Jesus, my suggestion is to leave it.