

Sermon Draft for January 25, 2026

Text: Matthew 4:12–25

Sermon: “Be Ordinary”

With the dust of the wilderness practically still clinging to his clothes after defeating Satan, Jesus enters Galilee, going into the region of Nazareth and Capernaum. The words of Isaiah spoken centuries earlier, which were read in this morning’s Old Testament Reading, are coming to life as Jesus Christ, the light of the world, begins to shine in the darkness. His ministry begins, and the first thing Jesus does is preach. Jesus continues what began with John the Baptizer, preaching, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (v 17). Jesus picks up where the Baptizer left off, both in content and in his audience, the people of Israel. “**On them a light has dawned**” (v 16).

We usually think of repentance as confession of sins, acknowledging our guilt over and against the Law of God, turning from our life of sinfulness to faithfulness.

That's how we usually use it; it's what you hear from this pulpit, God's Word for his people, calling the faithful to turn from our sins and trust the Good News of Jesus for our forgiveness and salvation. This is a good and proper understanding.

But Jesus' preaching of repentance is deeper. He means not merely confessing and turning from sins, but He is also calling for conversion, a complete change of heart, from lostness and unbelief, returning to the promises of God, spoken through the prophets which included John which are all about to be fulfilled in Christ for the salvation of the world. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Stop doubting! Stop being lost! Stop wandering! Stop being separated from the promises of God for you! You are his people! Stop doubting and trust in what is happening among you!" And then Jesus declares, ***"The kingdom of heaven is at hand."***

I suspect that when we hear the word kingdom, we think of it as a noun: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, or the fictional kingdom of Narnia.

Instead of thinking of kingdom as a place, with an address and location on a map, think of it as a verb: “reigning,” as in “Now God is reigning!” God is acting! God is doing! God is breaking into history in the person and work of Jesus, his Son, our Savior! The reigning of God is at hand! Jesus’ ministry is beginning! His preaching is beginning! His miraculous evidentiary work is beginning! The restoration of creation is beginning!

The kingdom, the work of God in and through Jesus, is beginning to be seen. Jesus is beginning to reveal himself as the perfect fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. John preached that it was coming, and now the kingdom is here, in Jesus. Jesus’ preaching declares it: the kingdom, the reigning of God, is no longer coming; it is now here! A past-tense promise of the prophets leads to a present-tense beginning of fulfillment in Jesus.

As Jesus begins his preaching and teaching ministry, he also begins to assemble those who will be part of the reigning work that must happen.

Matthew notes that while Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. The call to discipleship was simple, and it was direct: ***“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”*** (v 19). Likely, Jesus used similar words in calling James and John as well: ***“Follow me.”***

All four men respond immediately, leaving their nets behind. In James and John’s case, they also left their father behind. All four follow Jesus. Jesus’ calling is as powerful as his preaching. His calling, his words, provide the faith we need to respond. No person becomes a follower of Jesus by him or herself, and this was true of Peter and company. Rather, see this as the power of Jesus’ words in the hearts and lives of those who hear his preaching of repentance and his call to follow. Jesus called and invited; they followed. Even if it is with a simple faith, even if it lacks a fullness of understanding, their response is because the Holy Spirit is at work in the calling to repentance and the proclamation of the reigning of Jesus.

The four heed the call of repentance, turning from disbelief and unbelief toward the one whose kingdom is coming and whose reigning is beginning. They follow.

Their calling is unique: they will be fishers of men. Peter and Andrew, James and John are the first four of what will become a small group of men who will be identified as Jesus' disciples, his students. They will follow, literally, follow after him from Capernaum, across Israel and Judea, and eventually to Jerusalem and the cross. Later, Jesus will send them out in mission to the church. They will continue the preaching of the reigning of God in the church. What began with the Baptizer, what continued in Jesus, will be given to them. They will be eyewitnesses to the world of Jesus' reigning, culminating at the throne of the cross. That will be the message they will carry to the end of the world, generation to generation, as the church preaches the reigning of Christ and his promised return.

Maybe that's why this can be a difficult text for us to understand in our twenty-first-century context when we try to see ourselves in the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Their calling, their vocation as fishers of men, was so unique, especially being in the presence of Jesus himself. They got to see Jesus heal the sick, drive out demons, and restore creation's disorder, a foretaste of what will come in the last days! It's tempting to consider our lives, by comparison, as rather blah.

I was talking with a Christian man who dared to be wonderfully vulnerable and honest. He knew I was a pastor, and he said, "You know what the hardest part of being a modern-day disciple is?" I figured he was going to say something about having to kowtow to company policy to not play Christian Advent and Christmas music while at work, or being chastised for saying, "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays," or simply daring to speak the name of Jesus boldly and plainly.

I was a little surprised when instead of any of those things, he said, “It’s that the Christian life is so ordinary for most of us.”

His comment resonated with me. What does the Christian life look like as we get into 2026? Probably a lot like how it looked as we ended 2025, which if we’re honest, was much like 2024’s life. We come to the Lord’s house on a Sunday where we hear his Word for us, receive the Lord’s Supper, and encourage one another in Christian hope and love. We spend some time together in Bible study, a few of us anyway. It’s a blessed hour of respite and refreshment apart from the rest of the world and its increasing pressures. But when the benediction is spoken we go back to our regular routine. We leave this holy place, perhaps going out to eat on the way home or stopping at the grocery store to pick up a few things for the week. We get home and finish projects we had begun, do a little laundry, catch a quick nap, watch a game on television, and get ready to enter the rat race of the week.

Monday morning, when the alarm goes off, it's time to get up, get the kids up and off to school, get to the carpool on time, go to work, go to the doctor and do what we're to do. Go home, make dinner, and get the kids bathed and in bed, just to spend a little time with our spouse before we, too, call it a day. In between our doctors' appointments, meetings, ball games; dropping the car at the mechanic and pick up clothes from the cleaners; we have to call our accountant, and we wait for a call back from our doctor. It'll be more or less the same thing this week as it was last week as it was the week before.

In the middle of that ordinary-ness, it feels as if it would be nice to have Jesus walk by, interrupt the ordinary and mundane, and simply call out and say, ***“Follow me.”***

Jesus does—but not in the way we might want or expect. He begins with this message: ***“Repent, for the kingdom is at hand.”***

Not “repent” as he said in ancient Capernaum, ***“turn from your unbelief.”***

Simply, turn from this way of thinking and follow Jesus in the ordinariness of your life as a child of God, rejoicing in each day as its own gift to follow him.

We have an even more sure and certain word than did Andrew and Peter, John and James. They were following Jesus based on a simple invitation and, perhaps, an inkling that this Jesus was something special. We have the entire Scripture, Old and New Testament, that reveals God's plan of salvation promised and fulfilled in Jesus at the cross. We have the very words of Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the entire apostolic witness that points us to Jesus, calling us to follow. We are as close as that invitation and that promise, renewed and recalled every time we make the sign of the cross on our forehead or heart as was placed over us at the font, when water was poured over us in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He comes to each of us in the reading and preaching of the Word of God, calling us to repentance and proclaiming our sins forgiven in his name.

Christ comes as both the host who invites us to his table and as the very meal itself, as his body and blood are shared with you in, with, and under bread and wine. In these ordinary elements, in the ordinary preaching and teaching, in the ordinariness of gathering as the Body of Christ, Jesus comes and calls us to follow him.

Our calling and our following will look much different than they did for Peter and Andrew, James and John. The most obvious difference is that we are not called to leave everything behind to follow him.

Their calling as fishers of men who follow Jesus will take them from Capernaum, across Israel and Judea, and eventually to the very foot of the cross of Jesus. They will see him suffer and die. Most will flee, running and hiding, fearing for their lives. It will take Jesus' appearance on Easter Sunday evening, declaring "Peace," his ascending into heaven, his Pentecost delivering of the Holy Spirit to send them out into the world, no longer as disciples, "students," but as apostles, "sent ones."

We are called to follow Jesus in our vocations, the place where God places us, to serve our neighbor in Jesus' name. We have multiple vocations, and they often overlap: parent and child, for example, employer and employee, just to name a few. Most of us will not be called to be professional church workers or overseas missionaries. Most of us will live the ordinary life of discipleship in our ordinary ways. This is even true of pastors and the ordinariness of parish ministry!

Ordinary doesn't mean "less than." God uses the ordinary, remember? He used the "ordinary" Mary and Joseph to be parents for his Son. He used "ordinary" human flesh into which Jesus entered. He used the "ordinary" cross to rescue the world. God calls us to ordinary faithfulness and faithful ordinariness in those places and in those times not just in this place on a Sunday morning.

You are always a baptized child of God; you are always in a state of following; you are always in a place of serving.

Jesus calls each of us to be ordinary disciples through our ordinary vocations as people of God. Live each day as a disciple of Jesus, celebrating the ordinariness of the calling you live as a disciple of Christ, knowing that even in these ordinary days, Jesus is reigning in and through you.

Amen.