**SERMON:**

It isn't easy to say goodbye, is it!  Usually goodbyes are hard.  I knew a man who found goodbyes so difficult that he tried never to say goodbye.  He would tell people that he was going to leave on a particular day, and then he would leave the previous night.

Friends would come to say goodbye, and he would be gone.  That might have been all right for him, but it wasn't good for his friends.  Sometimes, we need to be able to say goodbye.  We need closure.

My toughest goodbye was when I left for college.  I wasn't going many miles, but it was a big goodbye.  With that goodbye, I became an adult.  I became responsible for my own rent and food - tuition and books.  I could no longer raid the family refrigerator.  I had been pretty independent through secondary school, but it was difficult to cut the remaining ties of dependency.  It was like diving off a high board.  It felt lonely.

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him, they left everything.  Matthew doesn't go into much detail in telling that story.

• He just says that Peter and Andrew "immediately left their nets and followed him" (v. 20).

• He says that James and John "immediately left the boat and followed him" (v. 22).

That's so clipped - so cut and dried.  It fails to tell the whole story.  It fails to convey the PAIN, and it fails to convey the JOY.  Peter and Andrew were brothers.  James and John were brothers.  They had always lived in their little village by the Sea of Galilee.  They had learned the fishing trade by going out in small boats with their fathers.  They had known their friends all their lives.

In those days, people lived in their home village all their lives.  They were expected to do so.

* When they were children, they lived in the village so their parents could take care of them.
* When they were adults, they lived in the village to take care of their parents.
* When they were old, they lived in the village so their children could take care of them.

That was the cycle of life.  They could not easily break it.  They had responsibilities to their loved ones.

How could James and John immediately leave their father to follow Jesus?  Did Jesus give them opportunity to say goodbye?  I hope that he did.

I think that Peter, Andrew, James and John must have had tearful goodbyes.

They must have been excited about following Jesus.  They must have been honoured at being invited to go with him.  But they must have found it difficult to say goodbye.

But you have to say GOODBYE to be able to say HELLO.

You must let go of the PAST to embrace the FUTURE.

These men, Peter and Andrew, James and John, were willing to do that.  I find that amazing!  But it cannot have been as easy as Matthew makes it sound.

It's always difficult to say goodbye to family and friends, but sometimes it's necessary.

But that isn't why Peter and Andrew, James and John left their village.  They went because Jesus called them to a new life.

Jesus calls us to a new life too.

 That does not always require leaving old friends behind, but sometimes it does.

Sometimes you have to say goodbye to be able to say hello.  Sometimes you must let go of the past to embrace the future.

When Christ calls us to become his disciples, he calls us to become new people.  He calls us to allow the OLD person to die so that the NEW person can be reborn.

Sometimes that requires a dramatic break with our past.

Peter and Andrew, James and John had been fishermen.  Jesus said, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men" (v. 19).

Do you remember the old children's song?

*I will make you fishers of men,*

*Fishers of men, fishers of men.*

*I will make you fishers of men,*

*if you will follow me*.

That sounds sexist by today's standards, because it fails the "inclusive language" test.  It doesn't mention women.

But it's a nice play on words that's easy to remember.

"You will no longer be FISHERMEN.  You will become FISHERS OF MEN!"

Peter and Andrew, James and John had to leave behind their OLD PROFESSION so that they could carry out their NEW MISSION as Jesus' disciples.

Could we do that?

Could we leave everything behind to follow Jesus?

It isn't easy.  Sometimes it requires sacrifice.

TERTULLIAN was one of the great early Christians.

One day, a man came to him with a problem.

His problem was trying to earn a living in a heathen world.

* What if a builder were asked to build a heathen temple?
* What if a soldier had to say, "Caesar is God"?

The man concluded by saying:

 "I must live."

Tertullian responded, **"Must you?"**

MARTIN LUTHER KING had it right!

In one of his last speeches, he said that longevity has its place, but longevity was not his goal.

God had given him a dream.  He had to pursue the dream.  If that resulted in his early death, so be it.

God doesn't call most of us to change professions.

God doesn't call most of us to die for our faith; but God calls all of us to become new people and to live lives that are different as a result of having met Christ.

* Just as Jesus called Peter and Andrew, he calls us.
* Just as he called James and John, he calls us.

Jesus has a SPECIAL JOB for each of us, but THE SAME CALL to all of us.  "Come after me," he calls.

How can we respond?  I am reminded of a story - a true story.  Some years ago, Carolyn Yeargain wrote about flying on a small airline in the Northwest.  A flight attendant asked the man in the row ahead of Carolyn if he would like dinner.

He asked, **"What are my choices?"**

She responded, **"Yes or no!"**

When Jesus says, **"Come after me!"** we might ask,

"What are my choices?"  Jesus responds, **"Yes or no!"**

* Not **"Later!"**
* Not **"Maybe!"**
* Not **"After I take care of my** **business!"**
* Not **"When it is more convenient!"**
* Just **"Yes or no!"**

 Our Yes's and No's shape our lives.

Our Yes's and No's TODAY determine what our lives will look like TOMORROW.  Our Yes's and No's today will continue to affect us for the rest of our lives.

Robert Frost understood that.  He wrote a famous poem entitled **"The Road Not Taken"** that dealt with decisions.

He wrote:

**Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,**

**And sorry I could not travel both.**

**And be one traveller, long I stood.**

**And looked down one as far as I could.**

**To where it bent in the undergrowth….**

**I shall be telling this with a sigh.**

**Somewhere ages and ages hence:**

**Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –**

**-I took the road less travelled by,**

**And that has made all the difference.**

I don’t want to give you the impression that, if we make a mistake, we have no hope of recovering.

The Christian faith emphasizes the opposite - that we can turn and start going in a new direction. That we can be forgiven.

 But it is also true that our lives will be easier if we don't have to use today to repair yesterday's mistakes.

**The people that walketh in darkness,**

**have seen a great light.**

When Peter and Andrew answered "Yes," he made them fishers of men.  When James and John answered "Yes," he gave them power to change people's lives.

When Jesus calls us - and he is calling us today – let’s answer "Yes," and see how he can make something new - something wonderful - out of our lives.