

# *Not Your Normal Job Interview*

a sermon

by Dan Griswold

Trinity Reformed Church

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Matthew 4:12–23

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A few months ago, my youngest son had an interview at a college in Boston. And because of obligations that Tammi and I both had at the time, neither of us could go with him. So we worked it out. Christopher flew to JFK airport in New York then to Logan in Boston, took the subway to the college, had his interview with the head of the department he wants to major in, hung out at a coffee shop, then came home. He did great. And a student at the college told him that he thinks the department chair liked him. Not a bad day for a first-ever interview. That should serve him well. It certainly won't be his last.

If you have a job, if you've ever had a job, then almost certainly you've had a job interview. Great fun.

Of course, some job interviews *are* fun, with good humor and pleasant conversation all around. But those are rare.

The typical job interview, though, isn't awful. It's fine. But it is just something you have to do if you want a job. It might be short, which is typical for first interviews. Or bad interviews. Or it might be long, taking perhaps much of a day, with hardly any time to catch a breath. Or go to the restroom.

Regardless of how long it is, a job interview is usually filled with questions. You meet with one person, or several, and they ask you questions. Lots of questions. And maybe you get to ask some, too.

For sure, I tend to think that the best job interviews will have questions going in both directions. It won't be just the person representing the employer who will ask the questions. The potential hire will also ask questions. Ideally, it's a mutual conversation, with both parties exploring whether this is a good fit.

I think the oddest job interview I ever had was for a job in a computer service shop when I was 21. It was the owner who interviewed me, and he seemed to want more to talk about himself, and tell me what he thought about this or that, and to impress me with his knowledge and strength, than to ask me questions that could let me show him I was up to the job.

Even if the one being interviewed never gets to ask a question, you can be sure she or he has at least one, heard loud and clear in one's own head. It may be "Do they want me to work here?" Or it could be, even more, "Do *I* want to work here?"

Sometimes you know the answer to one or both of those questions well before the interview is over. It's over before it's over.

So a normal interview will revolve around the "fit" between the job and the person seeking the job. It will focus on qualifications, experience, temperament. The questions asked, the scenarios raised, are all meant to help figure out whether this person can do the job, if the person fits the job, or alternatively, if the job suits the person. If the answer is Yes, then

“Hooray! Here are your keys” (or maybe setting up another interview.) If the answer is No, then “Thanks-Goodbye.”

That’s how it goes with a normal interview.



Jesus, it seems, does not do normal interviews.

We see this many times throughout the Gospels.

We see it in the verses I just read.

Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He sees two brothers. He calls. They follow.

Then it happens again, a little further down the shore. Jesus sees two other brothers. He calls. They follow.

They present no resumes. Jesus asks no questions. There’s no back and forth about background and qualifications, no “what-if” scenarios to ascertain their skills and knowledge. We hear no explanation about the job’s responsibilities, no negotiation over salary and benefits. And yet they go with Jesus to work with him.

You’ve got to admit: this is a little weird.

Well, it seems weird,

from our experience,

from what we would count as “normal,”

if what Jesus was trying to do was fill out the employment for his company,

if Jesus was giving them a job.

Clearly, something else is going on here.

But what?

To get at that, we have to go back to the start of this passage. And there we learn that John the Baptist had just been arrested. This causes Jesus to make a change. He “withdrew to Galilee,” and he leaves his town of Nazareth to go live in another town called Capernaum.

Now, there’s a whole lot said here that’s not, you know, said. It’s implied, suggested, assumed: things that those who first read the Gospel of Matthew or heard it read would have gotten right away, because they knew the territory and they remembered the history and they understood the politics.

Yes. The politics.

Because when that verse says that John the Baptist had been arrested, it was clear who it was who had had him arrested. It was Herod Antipas. Antipas was technically not a king, although he liked to think of himself as one. Instead he was a “tetrarch.” Which means that the Romans had given him authority over just two pieces of what had once been the whole kingdom of Israel: a piece up north on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, and a smaller, narrower piece just to the south on the east side of the Jordan River, these two pieces connected by a road that snaked along the river.

It looked like a map of one of those gerrymandered congressional districts.

Now here’s the thing. That northern piece controlled by Antipas was *Galilee*. Yeah. That was the main region he controlled, where he consolidated and exercised his power. It was

where he had set up the center of his government, in the city of Tiberias, right next to which was the town of *Capernaum*.

Yeah, Capernaum.

So when we are told that Jesus, on hearing of John's arrest, decides that he would "withdraw to Galilee," and leave Nazareth, and make his home in Capernaum, it's not that he's gone into hiding. It's not that he's running away from the powerful and dangerous Herod Antipas. It's not that he's afraid, and so decides to get far away from there. Instead he's going right into the heart of Antipas' own territory, setting up shop next door to the seat of power of the very man who held the life of John the Baptist in his hands and would eventually have him beheaded.

*That's* where Jesus went, as he begins announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven — God's own rule and reign — has come near, as he tells people all over that region to repent in order to welcome this kingdom. He does this, right next door to the capital city

of a man who desperately wanted to exercise and extend his rule,  
a man who wished and sometimes fancied himself to be a king,  
a man who would accept no questioning of his authority,  
a man known for holding grudges and using his power to settle them.

That's where Jesus goes, into a land of darkness, a land that had suffered time and time again from war and invasion, that suffered now from the rule of a corrupt and cruel pretender.

*Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.*

So Jesus goes where it's dark, into danger, to do battle with darkness and to usher in the kingdom of God.

He doesn't avoid it.  
He doesn't go where it's safe.  
He doesn't go where the work would be easy.  
He doesn't go where the message would meet the approval of those in charge.

No, he goes right to where it will be hard, where it will be dangerous, to bring his message of God's kingdom and of the repentance needed to welcome it.

And welcome it, some will not.



When he gets to Capernaum, he begins to gather followers.

Helpers.

Servants.

Disciples.

Whatever we call them, Jesus just picks them out and has them come along. They seem to have little natural skill for the task ahead. But this doesn't seem to matter to Jesus.

Because this is not your normal job interview.

He says two things to Peter and Andrew, and it seems likely that he said pretty much the same thing to James and John. Two things: “Follow me” and “I will make you fish for people.” The first is a command, and the other is a promise.

It’s important that we understand this right. Because some people hear this differently, hearing it say what it does not in fact say. They think Jesus is giving an invitation that, if accepted, would result in a job. They think Jesus is saying “*If* you follow me, then I will *have you* fish of people.” They hear it as “If you would just please follow me, then I will give you this cool new job, and wouldn’t that be great.”

But no. Jesus is simply telling them, *commanding* them (how can they possibly say “no”?) “Follow me.” There is no “if” there at all. And then he is making a promise: “I will turn you into those who fish for people.” Not another command. Not a responsibility. Not a job description. Instead, the promise of a gift, a new identity, a miracle to be someone new and to do something new.

This is not your normal job interview.

It has nothing at all to do with their ability. It has everything to do with *Christ’s* ability. It’s about his power to make them able to do what they should never be able to do given their background or experience or readiness, really, that *no one* should be able to do.

And what is that? What is it that Christ would have them do? *Fish for people*. Gather great numbers of people as if they were a marvelous catch,

not to capture them,  
not to exercise control over them,  
not to make a meal of them,  
not to slaughter them for food,

but rather to make plain the way into the kingdom that has come near, to make clear its message that both threatens and makes free.

This is not your normal job interview.

Because in it, Jesus does the hard work. Jesus takes on the responsibilities. Jesus commands and he promises. And so Jesus enables them to do what they need to do, enables them to *be* who they need to be, promising the miracle of their empowerment by which they will be fashioned into those who will do the impossible.

This is not your normal job interview. Praise the Lord.



What was so for those first disciples is the same for us. To us, as well, Jesus comes and gives both his command and his promise. For us, as well, this is not your normal job interview.

Because it’s not our talent or skill that enables us to follow Jesus and share in his work of bringing light and announcing God’s rule and urging people to respond to it with obedience and devotion. We do not train for it or prepare for it, nor do we leverage our experience to take on this work.

No, instead Jesus gives us the miracle of sharing in his work, a miracle given directly to those whom he calls. It is a miracle, truly a miracle, that he turns us and converts us into those who can do the unlikely, the unprepared-for, the impossible, those who can fish for people.

And as we are given a share in that work, he commands us to follow him, wherever he goes, just as he promises that he will equip us for the work as we follow him.

Again, where does he go? And what is his work?

Jesus goes where it's dark, into danger, to do battle with darkness and to usher in the kingdom of God.

He doesn't avoid it.

He doesn't go where it's safe.

He doesn't go where the work will be easy.

He doesn't go where the message will meet the approval of those in charge.

No, he goes right to where it will be hard, where it will be dangerous, to bring his message of God's kingdom and of the repentance needed to welcome it.

And welcome it, some will not.

In obeying his command, as we go where he goes, we will find that we, too, will go where it's dark, into danger, to do battle with darkness and to usher in the kingdom of God.

With him, we won't avoid it.

With him, we won't go where it's safe.

With him, we won't go where the work will always be easy, where the message will always meet the approval of those in charge.

With him, we will go right to where it will be hard.

With him, we will go where it will be dangerous.

With him, we go to bring his message, the message of God's kingdom come near, the message calling for the repentance needed to welcome the kingdom.

And welcome it, some will not.

But, praise God, some will.



My friends, Jesus is calling us. He commands us to follow. He promises to equip. This is not a normal job interview. Yet each one of us must ask ourselves: how will I answer?

May God give us the grace and the faith to answer with obedience, joy, and love.