

Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ: Commitment

Rev. Jonathan Murray

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Core Message

Rev. Murray's sermon on Commitment centers on Jesus' call to the first disciples in Matthew 4:18–22—an invitation that required immediate, decisive action. The fishermen dropped their nets, left familiar routines, and stepped into a new life shaped by Christ. Their response becomes the model for Christian commitment: a daily, grace-rooted willingness to release what holds us back so we can follow Jesus more fully.

“Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

1. Commitment Begins With Letting Go

The sermon emphasizes that “nets” represent whatever keeps us tethered—habits, assumptions, resentments, overloaded schedules, or fears. These may not be sinful, but they can crowd out spiritual growth. Commitment requires discernment: identifying what must be released so we can embrace what God is cultivating in us.

Rev. Murray notes that commitment is not saying yes to everything. Instead, it is asking:

Does this help me become who God created me to be?

Does this reflect Christ's love?

Does this open space for faithful response?

2. Commitment Is Rooted in Grace, Not Performance

Drawing from 2 Peter 1, Rev. Murray highlights that Christian commitment does not begin with human effort—it begins with God's provision. God “supplies what is needed so something can flourish,” offering grace, community, scripture, and guidance. Commitment is our participation in what God has already begun.

The sermon names the qualities that grow from this grace-filled commitment: good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, generous love. These virtues develop over time through repeated practices—prayer, worship, learning, service, forgiveness, generosity.

3. Commitment Requires Perseverance and Self-Control

Rev. Murray explains that self-control means governing impulses rather than being governed by them—listening instead of interrupting, pausing instead of reacting in anger, resisting dismissal of those we disagree with. Perseverance is the steady faithfulness that endures through difficulty, recognizing that growth, healing, and changed habits take time. Commitment is not perfection; it is returning again and again to Christ.

4. Commitment Is Lived in Community

Faith is personal but never private. Jesus called the fishermen into a shared mission, and FPCL's own mission—"We welcome all to love, share, serve, and grow in Christ"—describes how commitment becomes visible in daily life:

Love by treating neighbors as people made in God's image.

Share time, abilities, and resources.

Serve needs within the congregation and community.

Grow by remaining open to learning and challenge.

The world does not need Christians who merely claim belief; it needs disciples whose commitment makes Christ's love visible in homes, conversations, and communities.

5. The Invitation

Rev. Murray closes with a challenge: identify your "nets," name what must become a greater priority, and consider where God is inviting growth. Commitment is choosing to follow Christ in ways that others can see—through love, sharing, serving, and growing.

And the good news: We do not walk this journey alone. God's grace comes first, and the community of faith surrounds us as we learn to follow.

"Drop the nets that keep you from following... let your commitment become visible in the way that you love, share, serve, and grow in Christ."

Transcript

As you're able, please remain standing for the reading of the gospel as it comes from Matthew chapter 4 beginning at verse 18.

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he said to them, follow me and I will make you fishers of people. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As Jesus 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. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

This is the word of the Lord. God is still speaking.

Please be seated. So we're in a sermon series entitled Cultivate a Life in Christ as we explore what it means to grow in faith and action from Jesus's teaching. And this morning, we focus on commitment. Now we use that word commitment in all kinds of ways. To what are you committed? Work, family, friends, faith, That's why you're here, right? Service. So all of those things are true. Family, faith, friends, work, responsibilities, service. But you also might be committed to a cause or a goal or living a particular way. Most of us begin commitments with enthusiasm, only to discover that it may require more effort than we originally expected. Think about how many gym memberships start up in January and how within two months, many of those who signed up are not going. Commitment can be difficult. And when life gets busy, every priority, every commitment we set for ourselves competes for that attention and time. The same can be true for our faith. We begin with excitement and good intention, but what happens when following Jesus becomes inconvenient? or we find ourselves in a situation that competes with our faith. What happens when faith challenges our assumptions, asks us to change, or calls us to genuinely care about a group of people that we wanted nothing to do with? Well, our two scripture passages today offer complementary perspectives. Commitment to faith in God is more than a one-time single decision. It's that daily response to God's grace that shapes our commitment to how we will live, love, and serve. Now in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is walking beside the Sea of Galilee. He sees Simon and Andrew, and they're casting their nets. And Jesus says, follow me and I will make you fishers of people. Then they leave their nets immediately. Then Jesus sees James and John who are mending their nets with their father. Jesus calls to them and they leave their nets, their boat, and their father. It's A remarkable moment. How many of you who are still working would suddenly leave in the middle of a day? No, just kidding. It's A remarkable moment. These are ordinary people

doing ordinary work. These are not religious scholars. They are not the community leaders. They are fishers. They are living and caring for their families. And they simply leave when Jesus calls. Now that Greek word translated follow means more than walking behind or pursuing someone, especially in the context of discipleship. It means accompanying someone, learning from them, and ordering your life around their direction and teaching. So Jesus is not inviting these fishermen to agree with some idea. Jesus invites them to learn a new way of living. And their response is immediate. They leave their nets and they follow. Now I do want to clarify that simply because they leave their nets, their occupation does not mean to be a faithful disciple, means to leave your job or your family. Work and family are not obstacles to faith. But when Jesus calls and we choose to follow, changes will be expected. It's a relationship that we will choose and that means Following Jesus allows those teachings of Jesus to shape our priorities. So it's that relationship that we choose day after day, not a once and done decision. The fishermen follow Jesus and they leave their nets. Now those nets for them represented the life that they knew. In order to receive and learn the new ways Jesus would teach them, they had to open their hands. They had to release their nets. And commitment may require us to let go of something familiar so that we can embrace something new too. Sometimes the nets that we release are not physical. They might be a habit or a practice that are obstacles to us growing. Perhaps those are assumptions that we have never questioned, resentment that we have carried for years. Sometimes our nets are schedules that are so full There's no room for prayer or worship or service or even relationships. Sometimes our nets are fears that keep us from seeing other humans as made in the image of God just like we are. You already know all of this. Commitment does not mean saying yes to everything. And if you do think that's true, let me know. I've got a few things I'm going to ask you later. Commitment requires discernment. We ask, is this commitment helping me become the person God has created me to be? Does this commitment reflect the love of Christ? Does this commitment help me release so that I can respond more faithfully? These are not easy questions. Letting go can be uncomfortable. But we can also discover sometimes that what we think we cannot live without was the obstacle from us growing into the life God has opened for us. Now our reading of 2 Peter 1 describes a life of faith that continues to grow. It names those beautiful qualities. I like the way Peterson translates these. It's not simply perseverance and endurance and mutual affection, but it's good character. spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, generous love. But if you heard when Kelly was reading, the passage begins not with telling us we need to work harder so God will accept us. It begins with what God has given to us. 2 Peter 1 emphasizes that God has given us what we need to live a life shaped by God's generosity. And it matters because commitment can easily become another burden that we place on ourselves, thinking we must continue to succeed in order to remain in God's good graces. But

Christian commitment is not about proving we are good enough. It's about responding to the grace that God has already given us. One of the Greek words within this passage is *epikorego*. Everybody knows what that means, right? Okay. It's that word that carries the sense of providing, supplying, or furnishing what is needed so something can flourish. Our faith is not something we develop entirely on our own. God supplies the grace the guidance, the community, the scripture, and opportunities to grow. We are invited to participate in that growth. Think about learning to play a musical instrument. Mary, let me ask you. Did you take one lesson and become as good as you are? Yes. Wow. Wouldn't you love to be able to take one lesson and become just amazing? Growth comes through practice. To improve, we have to return to the instrument. We learn from the mistakes and we practice the notes. Faith is much the same. We grow through repeated practices of prayer and worship and learning and service and forgiveness and generosity. We practice them because we are learning to live more fully in the love God has already given us. The cornerstone of commitment is grace. And growth is one of its fruits. The passage from 2 Peter describes faith as something that develops and matures. It speaks of adding goodness to faith, knowledge to goodness and self-control and perseverance and godliness and mutual affection and love. These qualities are connected, building us, molding us into the kind of people that God calls us to be. Consider that word often translated as self-control. It describes the ability to govern our impulses rather than be governed by them. Practicing self-control might be choosing to listen instead of interrupting. It might mean pausing instead of responding in anger. It might mean resisting the temptation to dismiss someone simply because we disagree with them. Then there's this word often translated as perseverance or endurance, the capacity to remain faithful even through difficulty. Perseverance matters because growth rarely happens as quickly as we would like. Relationships take time. Changing habits takes time. Healing takes time. And the passage moves fully toward *agape*. It's that Greek word for love that is the love received from God. It's that active love that does not require something of the other person in order to give it. It's not this warm feeling. It's that love that's expressed through the commitment to seek the other person's good. These qualities are cultivated over time. It's something to practice day after day where we make room for prayer and we make room for worship and we learn from scripture and we serve someone in need. We apologize when we're wrong and we keep showing up. And when we make mistakes or fall short, we begin again because we begin with grace that is already present. Commitment is not a promise that we will never stumble. It's that willingness to keep returning to Christ and allowing God's grace to shape us. That provision so that we can flourish. Commitment to Jesus is not a private thing between you and God. Our faith, our trust in God is personal, but it's not private because it exists, it swells within a community of others trying to live from God's grace. Jesus calls these fishermen to follow and their lives become part of something larger

than themselves. They participate in a community and that mission that reaches beyond their own interests. Who can tell me what FPCL's mission is? Read it off the back of the bulletin. It's right there for you. We welcome all to love, share, serve, and grow in Christ. These words describe more than the activities of congregation. They describe a way of living out our commitment alongside one another and all whom we encounter, whether we are in this building or within the community. We love by treating our neighbors as people, even when their lives or opinions differ from ours. We share by offering of our time and our abilities and our resources. We serve by responding to the needs in our congregation as well as the wider community, asking how our actions can become a visible expression of God's love. And we grow by remaining open to learning, being challenged, and discovering where Christ might lead us next. Because the world doesn't need Jesus followers who merely claim a particular belief in God. It needs people whose commitment to Christ makes love visible in their homes, in their conversations, in their communities. That is where commitment becomes more than a word. It's an action that becomes a way of life. Jesus called these fishermen and they faced a choice. Do we stay with our nets or do we follow? They left their nets and began to follow and learn from Jesus. We have to face our own choices. We may not be called to leave fishing nets, but we are called to leave whatever is our net in order to follow Jesus toward that life of discipleship. What in our life needs to become a greater priority? What might we need to release? Where is God inviting us to grow? And how might our commitment to Christ's love be more visible to someone else? The good news? You waiting for the good news? We don't do this journey alone. God's grace comes first. God provides what we need to grow and we are surrounded by a community of faith and where we can love and share and serve and grow with one another. So drop the nets that keep you from following. Keep growing in the grace that God gives and let your commitment become visible in the way that you love, share, serve. And grow in Christ. Amen.