What did they do? Mark says that “immediately they left their nets and followed him” (1:18). They left their nets and their families. Although the Bible does not say anything about wives or children for these men, Mark tells us that Simon had a mother-in-law (1:30). Where there is a mother-in-law, there is usually a wife and a family.

Then Jesus saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, also fishermen, sitting in their boat and mending their nets. Jesus called them, and they “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him” (1:20). A good disciple, it seems, is one who leaves.

No doubt, the original followers of Jesus created problems when they left. Fishing was a family business, and I imagine Zebedee was not happy to be left holding the nets. Simon had a house in Capernaum, which he shared with family members that included Andrew and Simon’s mother-in-law, and probably others. With Simon and Andrew on the road with Jesus, who took care of the house and paid the bills?

The 12 disciples may have sent money home, as Filipino nurses do from around the world, but there is no biblical evidence that they did so. In fact, Luke tells us that a group of women provided for Jesus and the disciples “out of their resources” (8:3). The disciples simply left. And Jesus was proud of them for doing so.

So, what does it mean to be a good disciple today? We may not be challenged to quit our jobs or families to follow Jesus, but still we are supposed to leave. This means abandoning what we know (or think we know) and walking with Jesus in a new direction.

**A good disciple leaves the workplace to serve**. Many of us spend a great deal of time on the job, laboring in ways that provide income for us and for our family. Such effort is beneficial; but we must watch that our job does not take over our life. “How’s your work-life balance?” That is a question asked by career guru Jenny Ungless. She points out that the “pace of our lives today, and the fact that modern technology means we’re always contactable, can make it very difficult to ‘switch off’ from work.” If work takes up all our time and energy, we are going to resent it instead of enjoying it.

Jesus calls us to switch off, to leave the workplace, to go out and serve. This might mean tutoring an at-risk kid. Teaching English as a second language. Swinging a hammer for Habitat for Humanity. Stacking cans at the Food Shelf. Putting a few hours each week into serving others will give you a sense of satisfaction that you cannot find at work. Service brings us closer to Jesus, who said that he “came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

**A good disciple leaves the comfortable for the uncomfortable*.*** For many years, members of our congregation traveled to Guatemala for week-long mission trips. Although the flight is no longer than a flight from New York City to Los Angeles, group members often felt as though they travelled to another world. The food is different, the customs are distinctive, the language is foreign, and the living conditions are primitive by American standards.

In Guatemala, the roads are covered with potholes and cooking fires fill the air with smoke. Extreme poverty is everywhere, with squatters living in shanties by the side of the road. When members of the church group serve in medical clinics, they find that care is delivered with love but is outdated by a generation. When members do construction at the orphanage, they discover that good tools and supplies are hard to find. Home Depot is not around the corner.

And yet, leaving the United States for Guatemala is worth the discomfort. The joy of the Guatemalan people is infectious, and their faith in the face of daily hardships is inspiring. Strong bonds developed over nearly two decades of visits, linking Americans and Guatemalans in deep and loving friendships. For some members of our congregation, an uncomfortable week in Guatemala is the best week of the year.

**A good disciple leaves the familiar for the unfamiliar*.*** In the United States today, people are seeking out like-minded friends and neighbors, and the result is terrible political polarization. “Americans are increasingly segregating themselves by political party and ideology even in their residential communities,” says Greater Good Magazine. “This segregation makes us more likely to demonize each other, as more and more people live alongside people who hold similar political beliefs to them.”

A good disciple is one who leaves the familiar and seeks connections with people who do not share their race, religion, political party, or ideology. Such a person understands that Jesus did not begin his ministry by talking only with like-minded Galileans. Instead, he and his disciples immediately faced “a man with an unclean spirit” (1:23). Then Jesus “cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (1:34). And instead of staying at home, Jesus said, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also” (1:38).

Jesus and his disciples did not remain in familiar places with like-minded people. Instead, they moved into new areas and did the work of helping, healing, teaching, and preaching. Along the way they had difficult confrontations, which is to be expected when lines are crossed. But disagreements are natural and healthy, while polarization is not. Greater Good Magazine reports that polarization has a long list of negative effects, which include the weakening of family bonds, a marked decline in our willingness to help one another, an increase in stress and violence, and the growing inability to solve problems.

Disciples are going to have to make sacrifices and face hardships, like migrants who travel the world in search of work. But a willingness to leave the workplace, leave the comfortable, and leave the familiar can have a powerful and positive impact. When we reach out to others, we discover that the words of Jesus are true: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15). Just ask Rosalie. On the wall of her Texas house is a 6-foot crucifix that proclaims Jesus the “Redeemer” and “King of Kings.” She has a nurse’s prayer for a “compassionate heart” that she passes each day as she leaves her house and goes to work at the hospital. A good disciple is one who leaves.

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**A Good Disciple Is One Who Leaves**

Sunday, January 24, 2021 Mark 1:14-20

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

At a hospital in Galveston, Texas, a Filipino nurse named Rosalie worked the night shift. One of her patients was a 92-year-old engineer with a broken arm. Another was an 82-year-old man with renal disease. The third patient was only 52, but diabetes caused him to lose his left foot. All through the night, Rosalie who once thought of being a nun, worked hard caring for her patients, and then she “went out into the sun-scrubbed morning with a satisfied yawn.” In a book on Rosalie, journalist Jason DeParle writes about how “Celtic pilgrims talk of ‘thin places’ where the distance between heaven and earth narrows and the presence of God is more readily felt. Rosalie, the almost nun, worked in a thin place.”

DeParle’s book is called: A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves: One Family and Migration in the 21st Century. In the book, DeParle follows Rosalie and her family over the course of 30 years. Members of the family migrate around the world in search of work, then send money back to their relatives in the Philippines. DeParle says, “the money that migrants send back to their families is three times the world’s foreign-aid budgets combined. Migration is the world’s largest self-help program, the world’s largest anti-poverty program. It’s hugely important to the people who are relying on the money they get for education, for health care, for food, for shelter.” Because of this, a common Filipino expression – “A good provider is one who leaves” – became the book’s title.

The title intrigued me, so I read the book. Typically, we think of good providers as people who stick around; but in a world of global migration, a good provider is one who leaves. The very same is true of disciples. At the beginning of Mark’s gospel, Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee, where he sees Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea. Jesus says to these two fishermen, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:16-17).