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

***Following Jesus***

**Scripture:** Mark 1:14-20 NRSV

*(14)Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, (15)and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (16)As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. (17)And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (18)And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (19)As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. (20)Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.*

**Notes:**

1. In Luke 5 this incident tied to a ***great*** ***catch***.
   1. ***Jesus*** had met Simon and Andrew before
   2. ***Immediately*** they left and followed Jesus.
2. Twelve ***ordinary*** men who do ***extraordinary*** things through their obedience to Jesus.
   1. they were ***hungry*** men, searching for the Lord.
   2. they had ***doubts***, but they continued to follow Jesus.
3. “Follow me” Jesus’ invitation to a ***relationship*** with him.
   1. There is ***always*** that call to “follow me.”
   2. A call to participate with God in His ***saving*** ***work***.
   3. Jesus offers only the ***invitation*** to “follow me.”
4. “Follow me” is the invitation ***leave*** ***behind***.
   1. Spiritual growth involves some kind of ***letting*** ***go***.
   2. We accept Jesus’ invitation by ***letting*** ***go***.
5. “Follow me” is an invitation to and promise of new ***life***.
6. “Follow me” is about the ***freedom*** to be fully human.
   1. When we let go, everything is ***transformed***;
   2. “Follow me” is about letting go of our own little ***life*** so we can receive God’s ***life***.

**Script:**

Have you ever had a dream that felt so real, that when you awoke your heart was still pounding from what was going on and your mind was racing trying to take everything in; and as you come to a realization that it was only a dream, you have to wonder was it only a dream.

I remember when I was a senior in high school, one such dream. I may have shared this with you, but I am not sure. In my dream I was in the basement of a house with a few windows looking out into a community that was on fire. In my mind I sensed that the city was under attack, and was being over run by evil insurgents. With me in the house was my father and a young child. Nobody else that I can remember of was in the house. I was confused and scared, and I was helping my father preparing some tools or equipment to be carried out into the battle that raged. My assumption was that we were going to make a run for it and try to get to safety. But then my father looks at me and says take care of my little ones. Not take care of your brother, not take care of your sister; but take care of my little ones. With that he grabbed the packed items and went out into the streets.

I have often thought of that dream more as a nightmare. At other times I have thought of that dream as a weird experience. But at other times, most of the time, I have thought of this dream as a calling. My father in the dream representing my Father in heaven; and his request for me to take care of my little ones as a calling to some sort of service. As I prepared for college and becoming a teacher, I assumed it may have been for the students I would encounter. But as I matured I realize that it was preparing me to be the pastor I am today.

We all have moments in our life when we are called to service by the Lord. Some of us to fulltime vocational ministry, others to serve in the local congregation in some way; such as a leader, a teacher, a helper, a caretaker of some sort. What each of us are called to is between us and God, I only know what the Lord is calling me too and you only know what the Lord is calling you to. Still we are all being called to follow him. But not all of us answer the call at our first invitation, and then others respond right away. Not everybody commits wholeheartedly to what the Father wants of us; we surrender a little at a time.

But today we are looking at perhaps the greatest calling story in all of scripture. Jesus is in town and he happens to be by the shore where fishermen are doing their chores. And in the midst of their work Jesus stops them and invites them to follow Him. Now most of us would have to think about this. But the men in our scripture today drop everything and follow Jesus. We can find this story in some ways in every one of the Gospels, but we are looking at Mark 1:14-20. Join me in the reading of our passage today.

*(14)Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, (15)and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (16)As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. (17)And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (18)And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (19)As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. (20)Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. Mark 1:14-20 NRSV*

The first thing of interest to me as I read our passage today is that it is now after John the Baptist is arrested that Jesus comes to Galilee and begins his ministry. The time for Jesus to begin is now; is that because the Baptist is arrested or the he has completed what was necessary for Jesus to begin. We are never really told in scripture the answers to these questions and perhaps it is not for us to know. In Marks gospel we find an accurate account of Jesus ministry, but there is very little explanation and detail is at a need to know basis.

Needless to say, Jesus is in town and is beginning to minister to the people. And he is developing a following. We need to remember that in the Gospel of John 1:38-39, the Baptist introduces Jesus to the crowds and those who were attentive realized who he was. Andrew, one of John's followers and another followed Jesus. Jesus sensing his following said to them, "What are you looking for?" and they responded, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" to which Jesus replies, "Come and see." This is the first recorded invitation to any of Jesus followers. However, shortly after this Jesus was led into the wilderness where he was tempted. He returns after this temptation and also after John the Baptist is arrested. This brings us to our text found in Mark for today and corresponding texts in Matthew and Luke which are very similar in context and action.

Like I said Mark does not give is much in details, but in Luke 5we find this incident tied directly to the miracle of the great catch. Jesus is standing on the shore and in the boats we find fishermen doing the things that fishermen do when they are not fishing or have just finished fishing. The crowd following Him strive to get close so they may hear and so Jesus got into one of the boats, the one owned by Simon and Andrew. From there he teaches the crowd. And when he finished Tells Simon to put out for a catch. Simon argues a bit because they had just finished fishing all night long and caught nothing. But after some insistence on Jesus part Simon does as he is asked. Now remember that Jesus had met Simon and Andrew before when John the Baptist had introduced Andrew to the Messiah. So these men are no strangers. What happens next is miraculous, fish so abundant that they were beginning to stretch their nets far beyond capacity. John and James were called to come and help them get this load to shore. Once on shore Simon bows before the Lord in humble submission. And this is where Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” He walks over to the boat where James and John are and extends to them the same invitation. Immediately it says; they left their nets and boats and followed Jesus. And for the next couple of years are his closest companions.

Somehow the story seems so miraculous in Mark without adding in story of the miraculous catch. But when we consider the miracle of that catch after fishing all night long and catching nothing, we see the true implications of what is possible when we follow the Lord’s direction. In the next few chapters of Mark, we find Jesus inviting the other disciples. And in this passage today we also see the symbolism of what it means to be fishing for people, or a fisher of men, or what it means to catching people. Had they been carpenters Jesus could very easily say follow me and we will build God’s Kingdom. But in scripture we find these twelve ordinary men who will do extraordinary things through their obedience to Jesus.

We assume that these men are men of great faith, but not in the beginning. In the beginning they were hungry men, searching for the Lord of their life to bring meaning to their toil and sweat. They were seeking the Lord and even after they had found Him, they still had to grow in their faith just as we do. But over time, Jesus revealed to these men what true submission and love of God is and how it can transform a life. It took some time for these men to realize who Jesus was, and I am sure they had doubts, that what they were doing was not foolish, but they continued to follow Jesus.

Have you had moments when you felt the Lord inviting you to follow Him. In my life I believe the first time I felt that invitation was as a child asking Him to forgive me of my sins. And while I strayed away from that initial call, he never gave up on me. When I was preparing for college and having the dream that I shared earlier; I believe that this was him guiding me to enter into a profession that He would be able to use me in at a later time. Was my intention when I left for college to be following the Lord, I don’t think so. My intention was to become a Tech Ed Teacher and start a career. But I do believe to this day that as I was making my plans for my career the Lord was involved in the options available. In the fall of 1990, when I felt the Lord calling me from the lifestyle that I had been living and to follow him; I knew my life would never be the same, and I took the steps that led me back to Him. I like the fishermen on the shore were hungry for more than the toil and sweat that my life had become. I turned to him and began to learn, and serve, I was no longer seeking the pleasures of life, but the pleasures of what the Lord had to offer me. I grew spiritually, I met Jan, we would marry and start a family; and we continued to grow spiritually. Then in 2002/2003 I heard him calling my name once more, it took me a couple of years to realize what this call was really all about, but that is what leads me here today; standing here sharing what the Lord has done for me.

“Follow me” is Jesus’ invitation to a relationship with him. When the four fisherman accept this invitation their lives are completely changed forever. They will be different, the things they hold in esteem will change. When Jesus tells them they will “fish for people” he is describing the transformation in their lives. This new vocation is so much more than a new job, it is a new way of living.

Whatever your life is, how you spend your time, what you do for fun, what you do to relax, there is always that call to “follow me.” This is the call to something more a call to participate with God in His own saving work within the world; the work of change and growth. This world is always about the larger vision of God, orienting our life in a new direction, and experiencing that our story of life is connected to and a part of the larger story of God.

As Jesus walked along the Galilean sea, He saw Simon, Andrew, John , and James. Jesus called to them to “follow me”, there is no discussion, no questions no goodbyes; they simply got up and followed Him. If Mark had been writing about me, when he gets to the part where Jesus said “follow me”, Mark would have written “…and then Kevin began to ask questions.” “Where are we going?” “What will we do?” “How long will it take?” “Where will we stay?” I know because when I felt the call into ministry these are the questions I asked. And when I shared this call with Jan, she had even more questions.

These questions are not found in our passage today. Jesus does not offer a map, an itinerary, or destination; only the invitation to “follow me.” This is not the type of journey you can prepare for. This is a journey into the deepest part of our being’ the place where God resides. It is not about planning and organizing, making lists, or packing supplies. It’s not that easy. If anything this journey is about leaving things behind. “…immediately they left their nets and followed him.” and “…they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.”

“Follow me” is the invitation leave behind; our nets, our boats, and at times even our family. That is probably the hardest part for each of us. We’re pretty good at accumulating and clinging but not so good at letting go. More often than not our spiritual growth involves some kind of letting go. We never get anywhere new as long as we’re unwilling to leave where we are. We accept Jesus’ invitation to follow, not by packing up, but by letting go.

“Follow me” is both the invitation to and the promise of new life. What are the nets that entangle us? What are the little boats that contain our life? Who are the family members from whom we seek identity, value, or approval? What do we need to let go of and leave behind so that we might follow him?

Please don’t think this is simply about changing careers, disowning our family, or moving to a new town. “Follow me” is about the freedom to be fully human and in so being discover God’s plan for us as individuals. We let go so that our life may be changed, so that we can now travel in new direction, so that we may be open to receive the life of God afresh. When we let go, everything is transformed – including our nets, boats, and families. That’s why Jesus could tell them they would still be fishermen. But now they would fish for people. They wouldn’t become something they weren’t already, but they would be changed. They would become transformed fishermen. They would become more authentically who they already were.

Ultimately, it’s about letting go of our own little life so that we can receive God’s life. This letting go happens in the context of our everyday activities; work, school, families, paying the bills, running errands, fixing dinner, relationships, and trying to do the right thing. It happens in the casting and mending of our nets. These are the times and places Jesus shows up and calls into a new way of being and our world changes. It happened for Simon, Andrew, James, and John. It can happen for you and me.