

“Drop Everything and Follow Jesus!”

Mark 1:16-20

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As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets.

Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

Immediately. Immediately! At once! Right now. Drop everything and follow Jesus!

Do you find this word “immediately” as unsettling as I do?

The gospel writer Mark likes this word. He uses it 40 times in his gospel. That may not sound like a lot, but the other three gospel writers use it only 10 times altogether between the three of them.

This word “immediately” is crucial to our text today. It conveys something that no other word can. It tells us we are dealing with something—some ONE---extraordinary. It speaks of power, of compelling and irresistible call.

The call of these four disciples marks the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. In the first 15 verses of Mark, we are told of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus’ proclaiming the good news. Mark covers prophecy, sacrament, and word in short order. Jesus has just been baptized in the River Jordan and Mark uses the word “immediately” twice, right off the bat.

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. (Mark 1:11-12)

There is urgency in Mark's message! Do you feel it, too, jumping off the page after all these centuries? Drop everything and follow Jesus! Imagine what the people who heard this must have thought.

Imagine! Jesus is walking along the shore, and he sees these men, doing their jobs, minding their own business. Minding the family business, fishing. For some reason he calls out to Simon and Andrew first. We know nothing of the background. We can only assume they did not already know Jesus. Simon and Andrew are fishing with nets and Jesus says, "stop what you are doing, right now, and follow me."

Simon and Andrew, startled. "Are you talking to us? Just leave our nets here on the shore?" They may have looked at each other, done a double take, looked again at Jesus, with that searching look on HIS face. A dozen things might have flashed through their minds in just an instant. "Are we crazy? Is he?" "What will our wives think of this? How are we going to eat?"

They drop everything and follow Jesus.

James and John. Their situation was more prosperous. They were taking over dad's business; he was getting older. Zebedee was not as strong as he used to be. They were out in the boat (it must have been a fairly large boat) with their father and the servants, working hard but having a good morning of it. They had pulled in their nets to make a repair, so things were relatively quiet. "Someone is yelling from the shore. Can you make out who it is? I haven't a clue."

They drop everything and follow Jesus.

Zebedee: "My boys, my sons. Where are you going? What are you doing? You can't just leave! We have a lot more to do before the day is over!"

The Servants: "Did they just do what I thought they did? I can't believe my eyes. They just got out of the boat and left. What's going to happen to us?"

What does it mean to follow Jesus? To make that leap? To become a disciple of the living God? It's not logical. Frederick Buechner talks about following without weighing the cost. He says, "This is the way that men [and women] almost always make their overwhelming decisions. It is the comparatively minor decisions that take all the time and fuss".

But, Buechner says, "on the really crucial decisions of life—Do I love her enough to marry her? Is it worth dying for?—when it comes to decisions like

these, it is not just the pro-and-con-listing part of me that is involved. It is all of me".¹ It's not logical.

Jesus' command speaks to us whose lives have perhaps become humdrum, whose discipleship has turned into a business or a chore. We who are preoccupied with nets and boats and hired servants. Jesus speaks to us who have forgotten the power of the One who calls. He also speaks to those of us who do not yet know the radical change of life that is promised. The LIFE that is waiting for us, if only we will follow.

Jesus' command, "Follow me. Now!" is not asking us to add another task to our already packed to-do lists. Instead it promises us something, and the promise is amazing. Following Jesus gives us a whole new identity, a whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of BEING. Following Jesus is not something that is done in an instant. It is a process.

It's like jumping off the high dive and then swimming for all you're worth. It's flying by the seat of your pants, not knowing for sure where you will land, but flapping your wings as hard as you can. It's like falling in love, making promises you cannot begin to understand, and then living into them. It is embarking on a path you cannot see. Like taking on the care of another human being, with all its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows. It is a process that begins in a single leap, but takes a lifetime to unwind.

The gospel tells us Jesus called them so they might BECOME fishers of people. It is a process, the becoming. Jesus calls us as well, so we might BECOME so much more than we are right now. So we might BECOME more loving, more giving, more joyful, more spirit filled, more than we can ever be when we are just minding the family business, or our own. So that we can **become**, and so that we can invite others to **become** as well.

It was once thought that this gospel applies only to ministers or to persons whom God calls into leadership in the church. Not so. The rest of you are not so easily off the hook, to expand the fishing metaphor! Theologian Karl Barth reminds us we are **all** chosen for discipleship simply by the fact that Jesus calls us. We are claimed and named in baptism; we affirm our faith as young adults. Our baptismal vows, our confirmation vows, our membership vows do not have an expiration date!

It is startling. It is frightening. It doesn't make sense. The promise is held out to us, to become, and in the becoming, to be made new. And to offer to others that opportunity, too.

¹ Frederick Buechner, 'The Magnificent Defeat', p. 67.

It is mysterious, this call. The great doctor, Albert Schweitzer, who dropped everything and left his comfortable life of wealth to serve the poorest of the poor in Africa, said this of the One who calls.

“He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: “Follow me!” and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is (*The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 40).

He speaks to those who know him not.
He speaks to you,
he speaks to your coworker,
he speaks to the vagrant wandering around town
he speaks to the believer who has forgotten who He is

He sets us to the tasks he has for us in our time.
tasks particular to where we are
making sandwiches
giving away groceries
visiting the home bound
tutoring children
sharing our resources

When we obey, He will reveal Himself.
He reveals himself, not in ways we might always expect,
But in the trials
In the challenges
In the frustrations, we find Him there, with us.

When we obey Him, we discover Him.

Saturday morning, I was greeted with a phone call from our men in Guatemala, and a tear-choked voice telling me, “We feel the presence of God so powerfully here.”

And we shall learn, **in our own experience**, Who He is.