

Epiphany 3

January 24, 2021

The Call From Jesus

Mark 1:14-20

Mark doesn't mess around when he tells the story of Jesus. Mark started his gospel with John the Baptist and his message, and he told about Jesus' baptism and temptation by Satan in the wilderness — all in 13 verses. In today's passage, he continues with "after John was arrested." and moves on to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

The mention of John the Baptist isn't just a reminder of those earlier verses. John had been arrested. We'll get the details later, but now this is a reminder that proclaiming God's message is dangerous. Jesus, like John, has gotten into a risky business. Powerful people oppose them because of what they do. That's the climate in which Jesus begins his ministry. He doesn't start out as the pastor in a nice quiet congregation where not much is happening.

So "Jesus came to Galilee," the northern part of Israel, away from the centers of power. It isn't Jerusalem. It's largely rural, and lots of Gentiles live there. And there Jesus begins "proclaiming the good news." The Greek word for "proclaim" is related to the word for a herald, a messenger who runs into a city with important news about a battle or events in the capital city. It's like the old town crier, standing in the village square and shouting "Hear ye, hear ye" and announcing the news.

Jesus isn't passing on some religious information or rules, but news. It's about something that's happening that people need to know about.

And it's good news. The Greek word that's used means a "good message." It's "gospel," which means precisely "good news." To the people of Galilee, ruled by foreigners and oppressed by taxation, looked down on by sophisticated Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus' proclamation was good news.

And it was important news because it was "the good news of God." We're not talking about religious platitudes or familiar stories of what God had done in the past with Abraham and Moses and David. Now God is doing something new. That's why it's news! And if God does something new, the world isn't going to be the same. "The times they are a-changin'," as Bob Dylan sang back in the 60s.

But though it's new, it's also something that's been planned for a long time. It's what the faithful have been hoping for. When Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled," the word for time means not just a date on a calendar but the right time, a critical time, the time when everything comes together - Now.

So, what is this news? It is, "The kingdom of God has come near." Jesus doesn't say that the kingdom of God is near. That might suggest that God's reign is some spiritual reality next door that's always been available, one that

people can enter at any time by meditation or some other spiritual exercise. Jesus says it has come near. God is bringing it. God has been doing that from the beginning, from when he called Abraham and Sarah to leave their native land.

So now, Jesus says, the reign of God is very near, and, like John, he calls people to be ready. They are to prepare for the kingdom. There are two parts to that preparation, parts that are familiar because together they summarize the Christian life.

First, “Repent.” You may have been told before that the Greek word for “repent” means literally “change your mind.” It goes deeper than just choosing something different to have for dinner or wearing a different shirt. It means change your attitude, change your way of thinking. Your thoughts haven’t been centered on loving God and your neighbor, so change. Repent. And then “believe the good news.” Believe that God will make the promise a reality and will bring you into the kingdom. Trust God.

Every Sunday — maybe every day — we pray “Thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer. Don’t be disappointed if after praying, that you see no big change in the world.

When Martin Luther explained the Lord’s Prayer in his Small Catechism he said that God’s kingdom comes to us “whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through the **Holy Spirit’s grace** we believe God’s

Holy Word, and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.” The reign of God will finally encompass all creation, but it becomes a reality for each one of us when **we believe the gospel.**

Jesus first proclaims the good news to everyone, but then he speaks with specific people. Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he sees two fishermen, Simon — later to be called Peter — and his brother Andrew, and says to them, “Follow me.” And they do. That’s a radical step for them to take, suddenly to leave their jobs. Those jobs meant hard physical work from dawn to dusk out on the lake, but that’s how they put bread on the table. And now they drop their nets and follow a stranger.

Why did they do that? Had they met Jesus before and talked with him? Maybe, but Mark doesn’t say anything about that. What a gospel doesn’t tell us may be as important as what it does say. By his silence about any prior encounter, Mark makes the point that people followed Jesus simply because Jesus called them to follow him. That’s the way it happened long ago when God called Abraham to leave his native land.

And it doesn’t just happen once. In the middle of Mark’s gospel, after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus explains what that means and tells Peter and the others that they must take up the cross and follow him. Finally, after Jesus had risen from the dead, he restores Peter after his denial and says again, “Follow me.”

Peter and Andrew follow Jesus, then James and John do the same. Again, those two brothers don't have an opportunity to interview Jesus and see if he's the type of teacher they want. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the disciples "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Following Jesus is not so much a choice that we make as it is **a gift that we're given.**

More is involved in following Jesus than just walking along after him. "I will make you fish for people," he tells those first disciples. **The call to discipleship is a privilege, but also a responsibility.** Jesus is going to put them to work. Will they stay in their safe situations or get into dangerous work? It's the work of proclaiming the kingdom of God in places where that message provokes opposition. Those who proclaim the kingdom may get thrown into prison as John the Baptist was. The call comes to each one of us every day. As those first disciples came to realize, it's a call to be reconciled with God, to be in tune with the creator of the world. And it's also a call to share the message of reconciliation with others. The call to "fish for people" **is not limited to those** who have special gifts to be missionaries, pastors or evangelists.

It's a call for followers of Jesus, members of the Body of Christ, to be the instruments by which the reign of God and "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding," is made known in word and deed. That is what we ask of God in the prayer of St. Francis that begins, "**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**"

Let that be our prayer today!! Lord, Make ME an instrument PEACE