

Sermon
Mark 1:14-20
Third Sunday after Epiphany, B • Sunday, January 24, 2021
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Coos Bay, Oregon

What would make you drop everything and pursue an entirely new life? A great job offer? A marriage proposal? The chance to make a huge difference in another part of the world? What do you think? -- what would prompt you to take off from everything you know for something entirely different? What if it was a former carpenter and itinerant preacher talking about the kingdom of God drawing near?

That's essentially the scene that Mark describes and, truth be told, most of us --- have a hard time imagining doing what the future disciples do. Leaving their lives.

The details, as is customary with Mark, are few, which means there's a lot more that we don't know than what we do.

Mark tells us that after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee and started proclaiming the kingdom of God. We don't know how long this is after his baptism and his date with the devil in the wilderness. And we don't know if the connection to John's arrest is a coincidence or if there is something deeper at stake.

But the day Jesus walked on that seashore was life-changing.

Perhaps it was a day like any other day in the life of those who fish these sometimes treacherous waters. Wind storms come up quickly as the wind blows in from the Mediterranean Sea and over the hill country that surrounds the shore of the lake. Suddenly and without warning, the boats are in danger as the waves threaten to overpower the boats.

But this morning, Simon and Andrew, perhaps weary from a night of fishing, are still tending their nets when a stranger approaches them on the shore.

The dialogue is brief. In fact it might have appeared to them that this stranger was not that familiar with their trade. Jesus' words must have sounded strange as he doesn't ask the usual questions about fishing – how's the catch? What type of bait are you using? Jesus doesn't ask about catching Galilean talapia but talks about fishing for people? I imagine these rugged men of the sea this would have no idea about what Jesus was talking about. His words didn't compute.

The text gives us no clue to what is going on inside their heads at such a strange proposal. There was no preparation. The only note we get from the text is that their decision to follow Jesus was immediate. Simon and Andrew "*immediately* leave their nets and follow him." All we can say about the call is that "the kingdom of God" has broken into their lives in the immediacy of Jesus' call. There are also two other fishermen on the shore mending their nets, James and John, sons of Zebedee. The call of Jesus to them is the same and their response is the same. They leave their livelihood and their father and "*immediately*" follow this stranger.

These are epiphany moments early in the Gospel. As readers and hearers, we too have no preparation this early in the Gospel for such a story. Like the first four followers, we too have been caught off guard.

But then isn't this why we identify with this story?

God in Jesus Christ is revealed to us in our most unexpected moments.

In the answer to a prayer, in a loved one's touch, in a stranger's voice,
Waiting for bread around the communion rail.

God's kingdom breaks into our lives, unexpectedly, as pure gift.

Again, there aren't a lot of details, so we don't know much, if anything, about what might have prompted the fishermen's decisions.

We don't know, for instance, if they didn't really like fishing and were eager for a chance to do something different.

Nor do we know whether Simon and Andrew, James and John already knew each other. If they did, it might make it easier to imagine that once one of them decided to follow Jesus the others were soon to follow.

Or maybe one or more of them already knew Jesus -- maybe they'd heard him preach and teach, even talked with him before and were already considering joining him. That would make the immediacy of their response more understandable to us.

But, again, we don't really know any of this. What we do know is that there was something compelling enough about Jesus and his message that prompted these four -- and later many others -- to follow him, to become his disciples, students of this teacher and servants of his mission.

What do you think that might be?

What would be compelling enough to draw you away from everything familiar, all you knew?

What could make you leave your life in quest of, or in service to something new?

Even more, what would be compelling enough to draw us to change our lives?

And draw us to new lives?

I think that while most of us may admire what the disciples do, few of us would consider following their example.

Sure, I gave up a lot when I left California to find love and to follow the call to be a pastor, but I certainly didn't undertake the kind of sudden departure -- picking up and leaving everything -- to start a life on the road, relying only on the generosity of strangers and wisdom of Jesus. Simon and the others had no salary, no parsonage, no church-sponsored health plan, no pension -- they just picked up, left the only life they'd known, and followed Jesus.

I left California, but so did Cathy Denton, Kathie Hodgkin and Nancy Hoy; Lynn Danner left Massachusetts, Noma Hild left South Carolina. Many of you left places

and everything you knew. We all did it for different reasons, but we were each compelled to make a big change, to move in a new direction. Maybe it's not the quite the same as what the disciples did but we know what was it like to make -- and live with -- that decision to start a new life.

Where is God calling us to go? Who is God calling each one of us to be and what is this new life we've been called to?

I think that the Bible is clear that one call is as important as any other. If God calls you to be a disciple to your family and community rather than sending you to China or Africa, then you should take that work just as seriously.

It doesn't matter that you fish in a lake close to home or one across the ocean. The important thing is to fish.

Here's a great story I came across that makes sense here:

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these people who called themselves fishermen, met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of a fisherman. Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. These fishermen built a large, beautiful building called "The Fishing Station." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish.

One thing they didn't do, however, was fish.

After one stirring meeting in the Fishing Station on "The Necessity of Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit fishing in order to have time to tell about his experience to other fishermen.

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish? Is one following Jesus if they aren't fishing?

I challenge you today to have the courage to respond to Jesus' call. He calls each and every one of us and he has been preparing you for this call whether it is the call to a new life, or to a new ministry. I challenge you to follow Jesus into the work of evangelism. I challenge you to fish.

Amen.