

**The Third Sunday after Epiphany**  
January 29, 2017  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Mark 1:14-20** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (ESV)

**“Fishing for a Life”**

Sports fans are in heaven. If you are a football fan, you are gearing up for the ultimate event. College and professional basketball fans are in the middle of their seasons. Hockey seems like the most natural sport to be playing considering the current weather. Poor baseball fans, though. All they can do is wait. But even in the offseason, baseball has its share of drama. Just like we have constant, twenty-four hour news coverage of politics and current events, we also have non-stop coverage of sports even when no one is playing. We obsess about player transactions, trades, acquisitions, and contracts.

Maybe this aspect of sports is closer to a daytime soap opera. Because sports fans tend to get really wrapped up in it. The athletes have to make a decision about their lives. Will they accept a trade from their current team to entirely different organization? Will they become free agents and try to get the most money on the open market? Will agree to a long-term deal that will allow them to stay with the same team their entire career even if it means passing up more money elsewhere? It’s about their life and their future. But as fans we make it as if our lives depended on those decisions.

In Mark chapter one we see some similar drama when Jesus calls four former fishermen to full-time lives of discipleship. There is some suspense about how those choices will turn out. But you might be surprised about who is really making the choice, the tradeoffs inherent in that choice, and the results of the choice.

**1) Jesus’ Proclamation Gives Life**

At the beginning of this section, we get this set up: “**Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.**” (Mark 1:14 ESV) So Jesus is aware of what is going on with his cousin and forerunner. But instead of being intimidating, instead of running away from trouble, Jesus actually gets a renewed sense of urgency to do what he came to do. Jesus is concentrating on proclaiming the good news coming from God.

That's interesting considering what just happened and what's coming next. John is locked up in prison. Shouldn't Jesus be flexing his muscle as true God? In the verses after this section, Jesus heals many people. Isn't that his most important work? No, actually the mission of Jesus is primarily geared toward proclaiming the good news. The Kingdom of God has arrived in the person and work of Jesus. That gives the urgency to the message of Jesus: **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."** (Mark 1:15)

God's kingdom comes to human hearts through the proclamation of this message. Repentance is more than just regretting one particular mistake or feeling bad about a series of sins. Repentance is renouncing and turning away from a flawed way of life and a failed system for looking at your life. And then believing the good news. The good news of Jesus is the goal of faith, the object of faith and the source of faith. And that message gives life. Real life. True life in Jesus.

## 2) Jesus Calls Disciples to a New Life

Then we notice Jesus turns his attention to a particular person or group of people. He takes that main priority of his mission on earth and shares it. Jesus returns to Galilee, the home base for his ministry. And we see him bring others into his focus: **"Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen."** (Mark 1:16) This episode most likely comes chronologically after the one we looked at last week in John chapter one. It seems Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John were disciples of John the Baptist. They recognized this special prophet and the uniqueness of his message. But then John pointed them over to Jesus. Jesus found disciples. Jesus called disciples. And then Jesus calls new disciples through these disciples. But if we piece this all back together, we can see that they attached themselves to Jesus. They learned from Jesus. They followed Jesus. But then they went back to their regularly scheduled lives. They followed Jesus for a time, but then went back to their previous way of life.

But now Jesus takes it up a notch: **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."** (Mark 1:17) Now Jesus is calling them from a friendly, loose association in temporary bursts of discipleship to a permanent discipleship. They were called from a personal faith in Jesus for their own personal benefit, to a call that would benefit others the way they had already benefited. But this call also meant abandoning all constraints standing between them and Jesus. This is a call to commitment that breaks all other ties.

At this point, I think it's important to point out this isn't the way discipleship normally worked at the time of Jesus. The normal custom was for the students to seek out a master. They would analyze the teaching and determine the character of the one doing the teaching. They would figure out how they would get maximum benefit from this association. Jesus turns this expectation on its head. He goes out and finds disciples. He calls them. He gathers followers to himself. **"Follow me"** is all he says. (Mark 1:17)

When it comes to a personal relationship with Jesus that has so much at stake, it's not something any of us wants to jump into without a little time to think and evaluate. We think

of ourselves kind of like those free agents. Just like professional athletes we want to balance the pros and cons of locking up a long-term deal. It might be nice to have the stability. But quite frankly, I'd like to keep my options open. I'd like to see if there might be some other offers, some better deals, someone who might give me more. Maybe I'll sign up with Jesus in the short term and see how it goes. Then if it looks like it will really benefit me, then I'll consider going all in with Jesus.

Notice that Jesus isn't sweetening the deal for potential permanent followers. But neither is Jesus willing to drag along some negotiations. There is urgency. That immediacy pops off the Scripture page. When Jesus found Andrew and Simon Peter, we hear their reaction: **"immediately they left their nets and followed him."** (Mark 1:18) Then as Jesus continued down the shore of the lake, he found another set of brothers. While James and John were engaged in their father's fishing business **"immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him."** (Mark 1:20) It happened at once, without delay, immediately. That's because souls are at stake. The souls of those called can't waver between Jesus and their other options. No one can hesitate between the Lord and another direction for life. Souls hang in the balance. Reluctance to follow Jesus leaves other souls under the dominion of darkness, in danger of domination by the devil.

There's another problem with our free agent attitude toward discipleship. We want to keep our options open and test the market, but we don't realize there is no one who could possibly compete with Jesus. Any other option would leave us earning God's love and trying to measure up with God's favor. We would be subject to those brutal negotiations. We would go in thinking of how great we are and how much we have to offer. But then we would hear all of our flaws, every mistake, everything we haven't done or haven't even tried to do. When Jesus calls, he calls us to give up our lives for him. But we are the ones who come out on top. Jesus takes our lives, our flawed efforts and failures to measure up. He takes them on himself and takes them away. He gives us his life. He gives us his perfection, his holy obedience. God makes us the most unfair, most lopsided deal in all of history: **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) There's only one option that makes sense when we see what God is offering: **"Repent and believe the good news!"** (Mark 1:15)

### **3) Disciples Give Life to Others**

Maybe part of our hesitation, at the root of our reluctance is this pressure we put on ourselves to be those fishers for people. That's not something that comes naturally to me. I don't feel adequately prepared for work like this with such importance. But remember what Jesus promised when he extended the call to the first set of brothers? He said: **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."** (Mark 1:17) Jesus isn't putting any pressure on you. He's putting all the burden for life transformation on himself.

You are probably all familiar with alcoholism. Whether you have witnessed its effects first hand or whether you have observed it, you know it has a sort of snowball effect. The more someone is under the influence of alcohol, the more they crave it, the worse consequences for his life. It just snowballs. Flip that around. Turn those negatives into positives when

your life is under the control of the gospel. When your life is under control of the one who called you to saving faith, you begin to crave this good news more and more. This craving leads to blessed consequences. This addiction grows and takes control of your life. It snowballs.

Even the call to discipleship is grace. There was no great quality in Andrew that led Jesus to him. Simon Peter's readiness and obedience weren't what attracted Jesus to him. They were like John and James and you and me. They were sinners who had an urgent need for the good news only Jesus can provide. Jesus looks at us and sees people who can be put to work in his kingdom. First his kingdom comes to our hearts. Then it comes to others through us. By grace we follow Jesus to subject and subordinate everything in life to Jesus as Lord. Then we simulate the Savior in all his ways. We share the cross with him. We share the work of Christ, sharing the Gospel of Jesus.

A few days ago I happened to overhear a religious conversation in a local coffee shop. One young man must have been a college student. He was telling his friends about what he was learning in school about other religions. He was pointing out how similar Islam and Christianity are, how close they are, what they have in common. This could have been complicated and messy. But his friend simply pointed out the Christian teaching of justification. My ears perked up. Justification means a person is righteous and holy only through the blood of Jesus. Righteousness comes through the perfect life of Jesus and is given to sinners by the death of Jesus on the cross. Sometimes we make things more complicated than they need to be. This young man was such an excellent example of how simple fishing for people can really be. It's all about Jesus. We focus on what Jesus did. We celebrate the forgiveness we have through him. We enjoy life now and anticipate eternal glory because of Jesus. It really is that simple. And if you need any other examples, think of Jonah. He refused to go where God sent. He headed to the opposite end of the world. He hated the city of Nineveh and its inhabitants. Yet God used him to bring his grace to a heathen metropolis. God can certainly use you.

There's a little bit of drama in the call from Jesus to fish for people. You aren't in the Super Bowl. It's no game. It's a matter of life and death. The life and death of Jesus. Jesus finds you and gives you his life. Jesus calls you to bring that life to others. That's who you are. You have the urgency of Jesus. Your identity is a fisher for people. Amen.