

January 21, 2018  
Sermon Manuscript

**Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Follow Him and...

This morning the lectionary returns us to the Gospel of Mark. And the thing about Mark is that it's known as the gospel of action. It's the shortest of all the gospels and it doesn't spend too much time on Jesus' teachings. Instead, it's fast-hitting – Mark sticks to reporting the highlights of all that Jesus did, and he clips right through them. For example, spent only three verses on Jesus' baptism (1:9-11) and only two on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13).

So where our passage picks up, only 14 verses into the book, Mark has already moved past John the Baptist and Jesus has taken center stage: he announces the beginning of his public ministry by heading to Galilee and proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Now, we've talked a lot about the “kingdom of God” in the past – or “kingdom of heaven”, same thing – but it's good to be reminded that this “kingdom of God” Jesus is announcing does not refer so much to the afterlife as to something available to us as believers in this life, now. It's a mode of living in reliance upon God. So it's a spiritual kingdom. # Indeed, what Jesus is really announcing is that he intends to change both the way people live their lives as well as what they get out of their lives if only they are willing to follow after him. So, a changed way of living, in the power of Christ, is the kingdom Jesus offers.

But this morning, as we look more deeply at this passage as a whole, I want to highlight some *surprising* elements, which teach us that there is a lot about the kingdom of God that may be *surprising*, or at least counter-intuitive to what we might think.

The first thing that jumps out is *where* Jesus chooses to begin proclaiming that his kingdom is at hand. He chooses to do this in a region of Israel called Galilee. But what you have to understand about Galilee is that it is nowhere in Israel. It's a region that is mostly rural, with no significant cities. Just a few towns peppered here comprised of ordinary people, working hard at ordinary jobs, and raising ordinary families. In fact, in a lot of ways it's similar to the Central Valley we live in. There's plenty that's good about it, but it's not exactly where you'd expect someone to hold a press conference to announce anything world-changing, right? I mean, here in California, if someone were going to announce some world-changing news, they would probably opt for doing it in San Francisco or Los Angeles as opposed to say, Hughson, or Madera, or Oakdale.

But not Jesus. No, when it's time for him to announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand, rather than announcing it in Jerusalem, where the movers and shakers are, or in some other big Israeli metropolis where he'd have a big audience, Jesus heads out to Galilee to announce that the kingdom of God is at hand. In fact, Galilee is actually where Jesus does the bulk of his ministry.

And, not only does Jesus go out to nowhere-ville to announce the kingdom, but when he gets there, notice whom Jesus singles out and calls to follow him. Verse 16 says,

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

So Jesus chooses 4 fishermen. He doesn't go to the religious leaders of the day. He doesn't go to the scribes or the priests or even the governing authorities. No, he chooses four blue-collar fishermen. And yet we *know* the rest of this story. *These fishermen* are 4 of the guys Jesus is making his disciples, whom he will teach and send out to do ministry, and who will later become leaders in the church. Some of them will even end up writing some of the Bible. In fact, Simon Peter is believed to be Mark's eyewitness source for his Gospel.

So why would Jesus do this? Why would Jesus *very intentionally* go to Galilee – to nowhere-ville - and then pick four fishermen, four of the most ordinary joes around, and announce to *them* that the kingdom of God is at hand, and call *them* to follow him?

Well, the reason is because Jesus want show us that his kingdom is available to ordinary people in ordinary places; that no matter where we live or what we do, God cares about us. He has a personal interest in each one of us. And no matter what our station is in life, he is inviting us to live the life of his kingdom. He has a plan for each one of us, if we're willing to submit to Him and receive it. ##

But in addition to Jesus going to these four fishermen in Galilee, what also jumped out to me was this line Jesus has for Simon & Andrew in verse 17. Jesus tells them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Now, this may seem like Jesus is just being clever here. Here they are casting their nets into the sea and Jesus invites them to follow him by promising that rather than catching fish, he'll use them to *catch* other people (into following him as well). Someone has said that if they had been construction workers, Jesus would have invited them to become "builders of human hearts." Or if they been real estate agents, he would have invited them to become sellers of kingdom turf.

But what Jesus is up to here is more significant than it may seem, because he's taking their current occupation and *connecting it* with what he has in mind for their future. And what this means is that Jesus is affirming who they already are. Jesus is acknowledging that each of them have God-given identities that have *so much good* in them that God wants to use. Each of these guys has a particular set of skills and talents, as well as a unique personality and temperament, that has made being a fishermen a good fit. So Jesus is affirming those characteristics – He's affirming who they are – and all He's saying is that He

wants to take those characteristics and *redirect them* to – or add to them – an even higher purpose of **serving God** by expanding His Kingdom.

Well, this is significant for us, because what it means is that Jesus sees each one of us for who we already are. He sees the unique gifts and skills and personality God has given us. So, whether we're an artist or a carpenter; whether we're skilled with our hands or good with numbers; whether we're a social butterfly or a good listener or a deep thinker; whether we're a mom or an uncle or a grandparent... In calling us to follow him Jesus affirms the person God has made each one of us to be. But, in following Him, He simply wants to add a higher and eternal purpose for all of those characteristics to be used for His glory! ##

But you know this doesn't just go for what we consider our good points. Four or five years ago a handful of us around here read a book called "Boring" (by Michael Kelley); it was actually an exciting read! But at one point in the book the author is writing about his children, and his challenge – if you have a child or grandchild – is to think about that one trait in the child that can "both lift your heart and make you roll your eyes." He says "it could be their intense focus, stubbornness, creativity, the complexity of their mind." He says, "pick one thing that makes your child (or grandchild) unique" and he admits that that unique characteristic might be frustrating. For example, if the child has extreme focus, this may be sort of annoying if that focus is always on the television. And there are certainly ways stubbornness can be frustrating, for example. But he says, "Instead of thinking about how that character trait frustrates you, think of what that same characteristic might look like having been filtered through the redemptive hands of Jesus." In other words: imagine Jesus taking that kids' intense focus that is currently focused toward TV and turned it into focus upon Him? Or what if Jesus transformed that child's' stubbornness into perseverance to remain faithful to Him no matter circumstances? Perhaps there is something in that about how we can pray for our loved ones.

But Jesus' plan of redemption is *so comprehensive* that he intends to take everything about us, the good, the bad and the ugly, and redeem it for glorifying Him. ##

But there is one final element of this passage that I want to highlight. And that is James and John leaving their father and his fishing business to follow Jesus.

Now, what's up with that? Unfortunately, I think some have wrongly concluded from this that truly following Jesus will require quitting their job, or worse: abandoning their family. But that's not the point here. No, in the case of James and John dropping their nets and leaving the family business, the point is all about giving up control. If we think about these guys' lives in particular, remaining with their dad would have been a *safe* choice. Working for their dad, they could probably map out *exactly* what the rest of the years of their lives were going to look like – they'd be able to predict what most of their days would be like, who their friends would be, how much money they'd make, and so on. In other words, in their case remaining in the family business at least had the *illusion* of being predictable, comfortable, secure. Whereas, with the option Jesus is presenting to them: he hasn't told them *where* they'd be going, he doesn't promise them any riches or rewards; only the spiritual life of the kingdom – whatever that means! In other words, following Jesus would mean they would not be in control; and so they'd have to trust Him for provision, for direction, for everything! But what they would get in return is Him, and this Kingdom life.

So, you see, what Jesus is teaching us here is not that following Him will necessarily require us to quit our job or move far away from family. Although following Him does require we lay all of that at his feet. Jesus is saying that in order to receive the life of kingdom we must be willing to surrender control. In other words, following him doesn't just mean *saying* that we trust Jesus. No, for every one of us who sign up to follow Jesus, He is going to confront us with situation after situation in our lives where we will have to choose between staying in control – and taking the safe, easy way out – or letting Jesus be in control – risking it all – for the kingdom; to do life in Him.

And later in chapter 8 of Mark, Jesus will flesh this out when He teaches that “whoever is willing to save their life, will lose it”, which means that so long as we insist on being the author and controller of our own lives, it will inhibit us from living into God’s purposes for us. But then Jesus also teaches whoever *is* willing to lose their life for his sake and the sake of the gospel’s will save it”, which means if we are willing to continue placing our lives in Jesus hands, He will author our lives and write a story which is far greater and of far more significance than any of our minds can conceive. ##

So as I close this morning, my question to each of us is: which of these three truths did *you* most need to hear this morning?

Do you need to hear about God’s personal interest in you? That he cares for you; that he died for you?

Or perhaps you’ve needed to better understand what God is intending to do with you.... that God created you just the way you are, with specific gifts and skills and personality, but that he wants to redirect those characteristics to being ultimately used for His glory.

Or finally, maybe you needed encouragement to surrender; to be reminded that the life of God’s kingdom is available for you, but that nothing blocks that more than our insistence on being in control and calling the shots in our own life.

The four men Jesus called in our passage believed the future Jesus offered them was greater than any life they could have lived in their own power, while staying in control. This belief – this faith – is what spurred them to surrender to His call and to follow Him. May God grant each of us the faith to do the same.

Amen.

### John 1:35-42

<sup>35</sup> The next day again John [the Baptist] was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”<sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup> He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus<sup>[b]</sup> was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup> He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter<sup>[c]</sup>).

a. John 1:39 That is, about 4 P.M.

b. John 1:40 Greek *him*

c. John 1:42 *Cephas* and *Peter* are from the word for *rock* in Aramaic and Greek, respectively