

## **Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." <sup>16</sup> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew 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 fish for people." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

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### Sermon: Mark 1: 14-20 "Follow Me"

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I was talking with the Executive Director of Urban Servant Corps this week which is an organization here in Denver that mentors young people who do year long internships in non-profit organizations and live together in intentional community. I asked her at one point if this was a "call" for her. She hesitated and said, "Well, no, I'm not a pastor, but, I do feel called to this work." As I listened to her talk about her work, it was clear to me by her passion that it was a "call" for her. She was answering a call from God to do this important work in the world.

We tend to think of a "call" as only something that pastors receive. But the reality is, that all of us are called to follow Jesus in our own unique ways. In today's Gospel, Jesus passes by two sets of brothers who are fishermen and immediately they drop what they are doing and follow him.

Simon Peter and Andrew leave their profession as fishermen. The text says they dropped their nets and followed Jesus. This was a livelihood that they

had probably grown up with and were very comfortable with. They left their comfortable routines and livelihood for a new direction that was unknown and scary. A while later Jesus passes by two more brothers, James and John, who are mending their nets with their father. Jesus calls them and immediately they get up and leave their nets and their father behind. So they left both their livelihood and their family. They trusted Jesus' call enough that they left behind everything that they knew and cherished, to follow him.

Jesus says to these disciples, "I will make you fish for people." In older translations of the bible, this passage reads, "I will make you fishers of men" It was changed to be more inclusive. But notice in this new translation there is a double entendre, a double meaning: Jesus says, "I will make you fish for people." You can read fish as a verb in one understanding. Meaning that instead of catching fish, he is now commissioning his disciples to gather in people, rather than gathering in fish for a living. This kind of fishing has different rewards which are not monetary.

But another way you can read this translation is seeing the word fish as a noun. "I will make you fish for people." In other words, "You may have to get eaten up by people, you may have to suffer, even die for my sake. Well, we don't experience that threat as much in this country as in other countries where Christians are persecuted. But Martin Luther King Jr., who we celebrate this month, answered Jesus call to follow in his work for justice and he got killed for it. He didn't just make one decision to follow Jesus, he had to keep making that decision every day to keep following Jesus, even when he wanted to quit.

We are in the season of Epiphany and I talked a few weeks ago about an Epiphany as an "Ah ha" moment or a "God moment" when you have a sudden realization or turn around.

I'm sure that Martin Luther King Jr. had several epiphanies during his life. He describes one of them in his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*:

He says, "I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without

appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.

The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone. At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before.

It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.<sup>1</sup>"

Martin Luther King, Jr. was changed by this epiphany often referred to as his "vision in the kitchen." His decision to continue to answer God's call to fight injustice, not only changed him. It changed the world and made it a better place to live for all of us.

We too, need to renew our decision to follow Christ daily. It's easy to sit back and just do the minimum and not be active in our faith. Sometimes when we encounter challenges in life, we need to take a break and let others care for us and carry the weight, but other times, we need to step out in faith and follow Jesus, even when it's not comfortable or convenient.

When Jesus calls us to follow him in our lives today, there are several ways we can respond:

- We can shut him out completely- by not slowing down enough to even hear his call
- We can hear his call and ignore it
- We can hear his call and follow it

If we choose to follow it, it will at times feel very uncomfortable, inconvenient and sacrificial. James and John, Peter and Andrew all sacrificed something to follow Jesus. They left behind profession and family. They made a huge change and transformation. They repented. Turned their lives around for Jesus. The question I'm inviting us to reflect on today is this: "How are you sacrificing, letting go of the old, repenting, and following Jesus today?"

A "call" can be described as the intersection between the world's needs and our gifts. Sometimes calls are answered slowly and gradually and sometimes they are responded to quickly like the fisherman's response to Jesus.

There are lots of needs in the world, in our community and in our church that you can respond to with your gifts. We will be looking for people to join small teams to work on areas of ministry like: worship, faith formation, fellowship, outreach, and building maintenance. The council and I need your help in using your gifts to keep our community vibrant. If one of these areas sound interesting to you and you'd like to know how you can help, talk to a council member or myself and we can fill you in. We are also in the process of connecting with those of you who have listed new things you would like to help with on the Time and Talent sheets.

Robin and I saw the movie, *The Post*, last week: the owner of the Post, a woman, whose husband had died and left her in charge of running the paper, had two choices: listen to what's best for her paper, and her livelihood, or listen to what's best for the greater good. The just and right thing to do, which meant sacrifice, and putting the higher good above her selfish interests. Choosing courage instead of fear. If you haven't seen the movie, I'm not going to tell you which one she chose. But each of us have a similar choice. Are we going to follow the voices of the world that tell us to follow them (to get more money, more stuff, more power, more prestige) or are we going to follow the voice of Christ? The choice is ours.