

Mark 1:16-20

16 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. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Currently we are following the Gospel of Mark in chronological order. The author of Mark sets out to prove the same three things as other Gospel writers set out to prove; Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and Jesus is the Son of God. The focus of the Gospel is on Jesus, after Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, John is arrested, then John is forgotten. That is because the focus of the Gospel of Mark is Jesus. Then Jesus is tempted by Satan for 40 days. Then Jesus begins his preaching ministry which is focused on God not himself. In his preaching Jesus continues the call for repentance. It is crucial. It is a change of heart that leads to new life. It is a matter of turning from evil and turning toward God. It involves obedience to the word of God and a life of discipleship. The tone of judgment that is associated with John the Baptist shifts to a tone of fulfillment as Jesus proclaims the good news of God and the kingdom of heaven is near.

Today's Scripture is a story about Jesus when he calls his first disciples. Although Mark is concise, the Gospel reveals a lot of information. Jesus has been preaching the good news; the kingdom of God is near. After he announces that the kingdom of God is near he calls people to enter it. He goes along the Sea of Galilee where he sees the brothers Simon and Andrew fishing with a net. From Mark we do not know if there is a previous connection. We do not know if they witnessed a miracle, saw his baptism and the heavens torn apart, or if they witnessed the Spirit descend upon him and heard the voice of heaven say "This is my Son." We do not know if they heard about him from others, or caught the excitement of the baptismal crowd and heard the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near. The Gospel of Mark is not interested in showing us those details. Those details are for our interest. We do not need the background that prepared these four fishermen to follow Jesus. What is significant is their response. The Gospel of Mark shows us that their response is immediate. The four fishermen are professionals. Simon and Andrew, James and John, are not impoverished people living on the fringes of society with nothing to lose. They were making a reasonable living; they owned their boats and had hired hands. These were adults with a successful fishing business in a community that was dependant on fishermen. We do not know if they enjoyed their work or hated it, or how well they got along with each other. Those details are things that are interesting to us. Whereas, the Gospel of Mark is interested in Jesus and the way people respond to him. Mark tells us immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Today we have a lesson on choices. Instantly, without reserve, they began to follow Jesus. They did not need convincing; they were sold on Jesus. Their call comes from God and they acted on faith. For them following Jesus means to depart from the business world which would jeopardize the livelihood of their family. The point that the Gospel of Mark makes is that they were ready to turn toward God to live a life of discipleship. The character of these four men is a character of faith. As soon as the call is issued it is accepted. I'm sure we all have at

sometime in life gotten stuck and didn't know what to do as we wrestle with decisions. My daddy told me "Do what is in your best interest; do what is best for you." For a long time I thought that was good advice and I followed it for yours only to realize that is a selfish position. There is much more to life than looking out for yourself. We need to consider what the greater good is, what is best for everyone, and what the right thing to do is. The fishermen brothers gave up their livelihood to follow Jesus and they gave up their homes to follow Jesus and they did not have to wrestle with the decision. They did not respond on impulse, or desire, or fancy something new, different, and exciting. They recognizes that which is the most important. It is a lesson on choice. Once you know what has the highest value, then there is no wrestling with what to do.

Today's lesson is also a lesson on evangelism. The gospel story is not only about Jesus and four fishermen but it is also about us and our commitment to following Jesus. What condemns us is sin and selfishness. What saves us is Jesus - his death on the cross as a ransom for many. We are to do as Jesus did, to proclaim the Good News, and to tell people to follow Jesus. We are fortunate because we have the rest of the story, we know the outcome, and we know who wins in the end. We do not have to give up our livelihood to follow Jesus and we do not have to give up our homes. So the choice should be very easy. We are to go fishing for others, to be productive at bearing fruit. We are to be disciples; people who read and study the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus, make disciples of others, and teach them to obey everything that Jesus has taught us. When Jesus says follow me, he is not just calling the four fishermen, he is calling disciples, he is calling us.