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January 21, 2018 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Text: **Mark 1:14-20** (NIV)

*Jesus Announces the Good News*

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

*Jesus Calls His First Disciples*

<sup>16</sup> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mark’s Gospel shows us a side of Jesus we don’t see so readily in the other gospels. Mark doesn’t bother too much with the early history of Jesus, like Matthew and Luke do. Mark doesn’t get into some of the grand, even cosmic, aspects of Jesus’s work, like John does, describing the light the darkness cannot overcome, the Word who becomes flesh, and so on. Mark instead focuses on Jesus’ human side. Jesus is God, yes, but Jesus is also a man.

In this case, Jesus is a man who is already under attack by Satan, even at the very beginning of his ministry. Mark tells us briefly just before this that Jesus was out in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. Some time passes, but Mark doesn’t like filler. He goes right to the next event. John has been arrested and Jesus is starting to call his disciples.

Jesus is no stranger to adversity. You could even say it’s one of the main things Jesus came to do. Mark puts it together for us. Jesus begins his ministry by being baptized. He then goes out and suffers temptation at the hands of Satan. Then his good friend John is imprisoned. Jesus can’t just throw in the towel though. He has to keep going. He has to persevere no matter what gets in the way.

Jesus knows Satan will continue throwing everything he has at him. Jesus knows those who reject God will reject him, they will do everything they can to get rid of him. There are far more idolaters in the world than there are faithful followers. Nearly every place Jesus goes will be a battle, fighting against all of the sinful forces in the world. If they can’t defeat him, they can

at least make his life miserable. The world will vent all of its anger, hatred, disgust, and envy on him every step of the way.

In spite of this, Jesus forges ahead. He declares the need for repentance, continuing what John the Baptist began. He proclaims the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. The Kingdom isn't coming in some distant and unknown future. The Kingdom is at hand. Like watching the early, pre-dawn light that colors the sky, you can't see the sun yet, but you know it won't be long. It's just over the horizon and soon its arrival will be unmistakable.

Jesus speaks urgently, insistently. He wants to make sure everyone hears the message, even if they don't believe. He fulfills the task given to Ezekiel, when God told him he would act as a watchman for the people, warning them of danger. If they listened and did what he told them, well and good. If they did not listen, it would be their own fault when disaster struck. That time is coming and very soon. Jesus cannot delay his message for anything.

Now that Jesus has drawn out the enemy, it is time to rally his forces. He seeks out those who will be his disciples. He is going to train them to continue the work he starts during his earthly life. He has to travel a little bit to find all of those who are slated to fill that role. But even then he doesn't stop to take a rest. Then it's off to the next place he needs to work, to proclaim, to heal, to feed, to comfort, to be the king bringing the kingdom with him. The Kingdom of God is at hand right there in the midst of the people.

Jesus cannot wait because his goal is firmly fixed. The Epiphany season celebrates the journey of the Magi from the east as they follow the star. They seek out the child Jesus to worship him, gentiles who have travelled to find the king. In many artistic representations of the star you see it up in the night sky, three points with fourth as a long tail running down to the ground where Jesus is. Now Jesus is the one travelling, his eyes always looking up to the top of the mountain, three points with a long tail running down to the ground. Not a shining stellar body blazing in glorious light, but a crude cross of dark wood marks the end of Jesus' journey. There you will find the king, crowned in glory.

Jesus' mission is urgent and, though the adversity will only build as the cross draws nearer, he never slows down. He will arrive there without fail. So he gets right to work by calling his disciples and starting on the next leg of his travels. He is always moving toward the cross, closer and closer every day, but he has much to do before he gets there, so there is no time to dawdle. If he wanted to avoid all of the struggles and pain, he could have waited for a more

opportune time, when the task wouldn't be quite so daunting. But he can't afford to. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The time must be now.

The disciples are called to follow Jesus. They knew something about him. Some of the disciples had been listening to John the Baptist for a while, who named Jesus as, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The disciples don't understand the full scope of Jesus' mission, they don't even really get in the ballpark for quite a while. Nevertheless, he calls and they answer. They may not realize the importance of what Jesus is calling them to do. They may not realize the urgency of his mission, that this is not something coming in still in the distant future. In spite of this, they go without question and they go immediately. They don't discuss it in committee. They don't sleep on it and mull it over. Jesus calls and they answer right there.

Even more, it is important to see what they are giving up. They are still fishermen. They haven't mysteriously lost all of their skills at fishing, sailing, and that sort of thing. They still go fishing from time to time, but that isn't their vocation anymore. God has given them a new role, a new calling. They lay down their nets and leave that calling behind and take up the new one Jesus has given them without hesitation. Whether they recognized the urgency of Jesus' mission or not, they had become a part of it. All of the adversity that afflicted Jesus would find its way to them now too. They will struggle and suffer too and the end for most of them would be similar to how Jesus dies as well.

As a disciple of Christ, are you as willing to face adversity for the mission of Christ? Are you as focused on the immediate need to proclaim repentance and the coming Kingdom of God? Walking straight into a situation knowing it will be difficult and knowing it will be full of pain and adversity isn't something any of us does very well. It takes courage and bravery, a willingness to take the hits and to know there will be consequences. I think each of us believes we are courageous and brave when we need to be. If there were some kind of emergency, some danger that threatened, we would be clear-headed, focused, and would deal with the situation so that others escaped, even if it meant risking ourselves.

Actor Ryan Reynolds, who is known for his rather off-beat humor, said, "I'd walk through fire for my daughter. Well not FIRE, because it's dangerous. But a super humid room. But not too humid, because my hair." Though it's meant as a joke, it's not that far from the mark. It's easy to talk big when there's no pressure. It's easy to think we're noble and upright, but when the time comes to actually make the decision to run at danger, risking life and limb, it's

much easier to run away. Let the soldiers do it. Let the police do it. Let those who are trained in these kinds of dangerous situations put their lives on the line. That's what they're there for.

Why should I put myself at risk when there are plenty of others who are perfectly capable and qualified to do the job? I have other, more important things to do. Those folks can handle things just fine on their own. There's no reason for me to be in danger too. Just let me live my life in peace and security and let the real professionals take care of all of that stuff. It's so much easier to just keep the status quo and let the rest of the world worry about itself.

That sounds like the sensible course of action, but all it really is is a cover for our sin. Of course no one wants to be in danger. No one wants to face hardship. No one wants to be the focus of insults and hostilities, to have people angry at them, to have people so riled up they want to throw you out of town and kill you. No one wants any part of that. It's so much easier to pass that job on to others.

The mission is urgent. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repentance must be preached alongside the Gospel. Time is short and people must be warned so they can prepare. God does prepare a special class of people whose job it is to proclaim the Gospel, they are disciples. But disciples don't need seminary training. They don't need to have been working as missionaries for years before being qualified. Disciples are those people Jesus calls to follow him. Everyone who hears his words and believes is a disciple of Christ. Even simple fishermen with no formal training are called and made disciples.

You think to yourself, "I have no idea what it means to be a disciple like that. I can't do what they did." The disciples couldn't do what they did before Jesus called them either. Hear what he says again, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." It is because of Christ that they become who they were called to be.

In that, they are not so different from us. The gospel of Christ is ours too. The same message has been given to us. Repenting of our sins, Christ tells us we are forgiven. The past is washed away and the joys of God's Kingdom are ours now too. To believe and repent we had to also receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has come to dwell within us and has brought us to faith. Through the Spirit, we have been called to follow Christ and now are counted among his disciples. The disciples of Jesus day follow behind their Lord, walking where he walked and travelling where he travelled. They followed him to the grave and beyond. Jesus rises from the grave and his disciples will follow him there as well.

Jesus has given you the gospel and the Spirit has given you the ability to trust what he says in it. You have been cleansed of your sins through repentance and forgiveness. Even more, God has brought you to the font, where you are claimed as his own. The Spirit works through the water to make your calling as Jesus' disciple sure and certain.

That means you are the most qualified person to fulfill the calling God has given you. He has given you everything necessary to carry out the work. You have the Bible, you have the Spirit working in you to continue your life of repentance and grace through Christ Jesus. You have Jesus himself leading you to where he needs you. You have the clear and certain message Jesus gave, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Do not worry about whether you can do what needs to be done. Jesus himself will make you a fisher of men.