

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:14-20

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

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

Simply Follow Jesus

It is remarkably simple. It’s not complicated. As one theologian said who wrote about and lived so much in discipleship: when Jesus calls there’s not even a verbal response that’s required. He’s not looking for a confession of faith right now. When Jesus calls, stop what you’re doing. Put down your nets. Turn off the TV. Actually, you can turn it off or leave it on -- just get up and go with him. It’s remarkably simple, terribly uncomplicated. Our first task is to follow behind the one who brings us Good News of the Kingdom come.

We can imagine the scene from our Gospel reading. The Sea of Galilee, “just off the hills of brown.” A body of water where children splash and play to escape the hot sun. A lake that is the center of communities and livelihoods, where sky and clouds merge together to reflect the glory of God as light breaks through. You find on it’s shores Simon and his brother Andrew doing what they love to do and what they have to do. Hands calloused. Eyes and ears effortlessly aware of the movement of the water. In the very act of casting a net into the sea -- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets -- left them in the water, fish splashing, money and food on the table -- immediately they left their nets and the text says, “They followed him.”

Down the beach a ways, he finds the Zebedee family operation. This one is not simply two guys and a net, it’s an operation that has been built over generations, passed down from father to son again and again. Here you have boats at the ready, supplies organized, nets used so much they

wear out and need repair. Here we find fish piled high and ready for the market. Simon and Andrew worked for Zebedee and Sons Fishing Company before. Got their start with them until old man Zebedee tired of Simon's yapping. "More talking than working," he said, and Zebedee sent the brothers on their way.

While we would like to imagine that this all happened quietly and with serenity, there's no denying that Jesus made a scene that day with the Zebedees. Familial obligations and expectations were in the air each day -- they didn't have to be spoken -- and that day was no exception. James and John were in the water, in their boat mending the nets when they looked up and saw Jesus for the first time. James first, and then he reached down and shook John's shoulder who told him to "cut it out" until he looked up too. And there, standing in the water, was Jesus of Nazareth, eyes locked on them. We aren't sure what Jesus said to them. Perhaps an invitation to fish for people was issued again. Perhaps he just made eye contact with their souls and put out his hand to waive them in. But we know their hearts began to beat as never before, a feeling traveled through their entire bodies as they stepped out of the boat and landed with a splash. It was deeper than it should have been. Their father asked them what the hell was going on. The hired men were entertained at first and then the humor evaporated quickly like a puddle in the desert sun because they could tell that a family was just made different by this Jesus of Nazareth. Whether it was good or bad, the hired men could not say, but funny it was not. And what does Mark tell us? How does he describe the moment? "They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him."

It is remarkably simple. It's not that complicated. It all begins with following Jesus. Simple obedience is the first step to belief. You know how to walk, don't you? Well pick up your feet and walk with Jesus. Make your legs move if that's all you can do but get up and go after him. Follow Jesus and he will make you fish for people.

This is the one relationship that changes our relationship to everything and everyone else. Simon and Andrew, James and John, they had dreams, you know? They had families. We know Simon Peter had a wife, probably children running around. They had business obligations. Familial duties. Vacations planned. Errands to run. But all of that changed when Jesus called because in following him it changes our relationship to everything and everyone else. Following Jesus changes how we are a husband or a wife. It changes how we are a father or a mother. It changes how we are a son or a daughter. Following Jesus changes how we do business or use money or spend time. We find in him love to share, forgiveness to give away, hope that we cannot hoard. Jesus changes our relationship to our friends. He changes our relationship to our enemies. We find in Jesus a Kingdom we didn't realize existed and we are living in it, loving through it, laughing unexpectedly.

If there was one thing that we could claim as Episcopalians, it would be this: We are followers of Jesus. Just remember how basic, how simple, how uncomplicated it really is! I cannot tell you how many times people ask me what Episcopalians believe. Usually it's a loaded question. They want to know if we think about things the way they do -- subscribe to some angle that they've been told is what makes you a true believer. They want to know if we buy what they're selling. And just want to tell them -- I just want you to tell them -- that we are most simply followers of Jesus of Nazareth. At some point in our lives, we heard him call us by name. We didn't know exactly who he was. We didn't know where he was going. We didn't know what he would require of us. We just found our feet about to leave the rest of us behind and our hearts wide open with longing. We are here to follow Jesus, to be his disciples.

And -- you know what -- we get to follow him together. Simon and Andrew, James and John, they were already brothers but then they became *brothers*, if you know what I mean. They formed a community with Jesus at the center which would grow from there. They walked after him and as he loved them they began to love one another. And others kept getting invited, too. It wasn't about being the same kind of person. It wasn't about having the same worldview or beliefs. It wasn't about how much or how little you have. It was then and it is now about following Jesus.

As Jesus invited these fishermen to follow him, so I invite you now. Won't you put down what you're doing and follow Jesus with me? We aren't perfect -- that's not required. We sometimes lose track of him in the darkness or busyness of it all. Occasionally all that we can make out are his footprints on the way and it's like we are tracking him through the wild, but we are dedicated to the simple, uncomplicated task of following Jesus. We don't have to do it alone. And we would like it very much if you would join us... if you would join this church (officially), if you would be baptized or confirmed in his name, if you would find purpose and renewal in our Savior who called Simon and Andrew, James and John, and who now calls you and me. To do what exactly? To simply follow him.