

Reflection for Epiphany III Year B

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Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:6-14; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

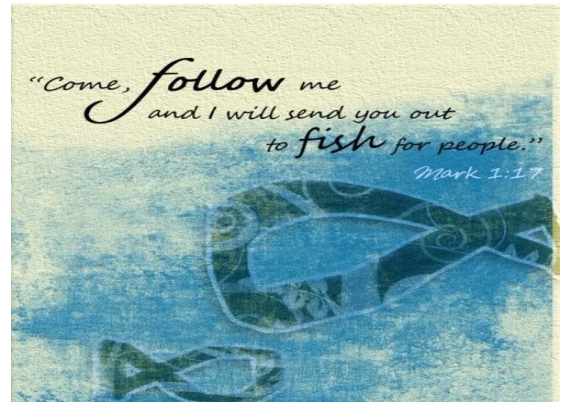
Sunday, January 21st, 2024

Follow Me ~ Immediately

When we were little kids we all played the game,
"Follow the Leader."

The rules were very simple. A leader was chosen and everyone else followed him or her wherever they were led and mimicked the leader's actions - skip, jump, turn in circles, somersault, crab walk, and so on. If any player messed up or refused to follow the leader's instructions they were out.

We all wanted to stay in the game and be the last kid left because we all wanted to become the next leader.



"Follow the Leader" is a great children's game, but in our adult daily lives we play follow the leader, too. In school, in Church, in sports, in clubs, in any activity we join, there are always leaders. Every day we are faced with deciding which leader we will follow. But we must be sure to pick a leader who will guide us in the right direction. (1)

According to Gospel writer, Mark, the real significance of Jesus' life begins at the time of his baptism.

When John the Baptist declares, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me," (1:7) "Mark allows Jesus merely to appear from out of nowhere," as described by Rev. Scott Hoezee. (2) Mark briefly describe Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience before he travels to Galilee to begin his ministry.

Today's story tells us how Jesus chose his first disciples and instructed them to follow him as the leader, and, as Pastor Hoezee continues, "starts to cobble together a set of followers that can be described only (and perhaps at best) as rag-tag." (2)

And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (v 17)

"Follow me."

Dr. Jason Allen, President of Midwestern Seminary, expounds this two word sentence:

This is the essence of discipleship, and Jesus would say this thirteen times in the gospels— "Follow me." ... The Christian life is the Christ life. He does not say, "Follow my rules, follow my church, follow my activities, follow my morality, or follow my teaching." Though all of these are associate realities with discipleship; he says, "Follow me." Christianity is knowing Christ, loving Christ, worshipping Christ, obeying Christ, serving Christ, and cherishing Christ. "Follow me" is a personal call, and it is also an unconditional call. We know this both in the simplicity and the directness of it, but also in their response. Jesus does not first give them a job description. He does not give them a track for promotion so they can know what their future holds. He does not give them a ministry calendar to know what the weeks or months or

years ahead will look like. He does not give them any geographical definition so they will know whether or not they have to leave their mother's basement. He does not say any of these things. Instead, he gives them the unconditional call, "follow me." (3)

"And immediately they left their nets and followed him." (v 18)

Mark shows us a Jesus on the move, a Jesus who does everything immediately. People go and they go "immediately."

The word "immediately" occurs twice in today's reading and many times throughout the whole Gospel. Mark gives us just the details we need, and the result is a fast-paced, streamlined account of who Jesus is, what Jesus does, and how people respond.

That's all we get to describe how Jesus called his first disciples and how they responded. Jesus preaches a single distinctive message when he comes to Galilee: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (v 15)

That's it. In just seven verses our Gospel writer Mark commands four fishermen drop everything and follow Jesus on the basis of his two-word command: "Follow me." (2)

This was their epiphany.

Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis describes Epiphany as "'an immediate and meaningful understanding of something. Surprising. Sudden. Profound...[not so much] about marking time [but] more about describing action. Immediately does not only designate a *when* but a *what*. Not only a place in time, but an event that changes the meaning of life.'" (4)

"'Follow me' is Jesus' invitation to a new life. If these four fishermen accept the invitation, their lives will forever be different. They will be different. They will no longer catch fish. They will fish for people.

When Jesus says, "I will make you fish for people," he is describing the transformation of their lives, not simply a job catching new members or followers. He could just as easily have said to the carpenters, "Follow me, and you will build the kingdom of heaven." To the farmers, "Follow me, and you will grow God's people. To the doctors, "Follow me, and you will heal the brokenness of the world." To the teachers, "Follow me, and you will open minds and hearts to the presence of God." To the parents, "Follow me, and you will nurture new life.'" (5)

This Gospel reading is also an invitation to leave behind the old life - "And immediately they left their nets" (v 18) - and embark on an inner journey of spiritual growth and commitment.

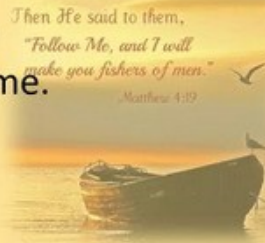
"We never get anywhere new as long as we're unwilling to leave where we are. We accept Jesus' invitation to follow...by letting go." (5)

This week, at least according to Mark, Epiphany is when your life is changed immediately. My epiphany occurred two nights before my 58th birthday, almost fifteen years ago. The dream I had is forever etched in my memory, urgently leading me to Christ Church the following morning on Palm Sunday 2009.

I accepted Jesus' invitation immediately and my life has been profoundly changed and enriched beyond measure, abandoning my old life net and reshaping my life in response to God's call.

Jesus is still calling people to follow him today. He has called you and me to follow him. Immediately. It's up to us to decide if we will follow the Leader.

Lord, Your summons echoes true
when You but call my name.
Let me turn and follow You
and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go
where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.



("The Summons" by John Bell., Copyright: Iona, 1987)

Amen.

Sources:

- 1 adapted from Stories for Sermons, pp 284-285, kayala.com
- 2 Sermon Commentary by Scott Hoezee, January 21, 2018, cephreaching.org
- 3 MBTS Spring 2017 Convocation Sermon: "Follow Me and I Will Make You Fishers of Men" (Mark 1:14-20) presented by Jason K. Allen, President of Midwestern Seminary, February 1st, 2017
- 4 "The Immediately of Epiphany" by Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis, January 18, 2016, workingpreacher.org
- 5 "Casting and Mending" – A Sermon on Mark 1:14-20, Epiphany 3B on January 23, 2012 © Michael K. Marsh and Interrupting the Silence, 2009-2023, all rights reserved, excerpts permitted