

"Follow Me"

Today we begin a series on the gospel of Mark. Now, we in a sense began this series last month, on my first Sunday here, when I preached from Mark 1:1-15. That was the Sunday before Christmas so I preached a Christmas sermon and also a sermon about the start of ministry. And as we looked at verses 1-15, we saw that the passage described the coming of Jesus into this world to start his earthly ministry. We saw that the passage announced the coming king and the coming kingdom. John the Baptist announced the coming of the king, namely Jesus, and Jesus announced the coming of the kingdom at the start of his ministry. And as we looked at the start of Jesus' ministry we were reminded that we too were starting ministry together - a ministry that was founded upon this kingdom ministry of Jesus.

And so as we resume our study in Mark this morning, we are reminded that we are part of this kingdom ministry. And so as we look at Mark, we'll be learning more about this ministry. We'll learn what this kingdom of God is all about. We'll learn more about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. And so we'll see that Mark talks a lot about discipleship - following Jesus, learning his teachings and putting them into practice. We'll see that each of us is called to discipleship - to follow Jesus.

And as we begin to study the Gospel of Mark, one trait that you will find is that his account of Jesus is fast paced. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of all 4 gospels, and yet it is full of action. Mark records Jesus in action, going from one place to the next, always on the move, busy about the kingdom ministry. You'll probably begin to notice the word "immediately" - *euthus* in the Greek. It appears 12 times in this first chapter and 41 times total in the mere 16 chapters of Mark. This same word only appears 17 times in the rest of the entire New Testament, so it's not that this is just a common word. Instead Mark is setting a lightning pace of his account, showing Jesus in action. Look at even this first half of the chapter which we read - look at how many different scenes we've already seen. First we saw a summary of the entire ministry of John the Baptist, then a record of Jesus' baptism, then a record of Jesus' wilderness temptation, then Jesus begins his ministry, then he calls the first disciples - all in 20 verses, and just half of this chapter! Just glance over the rest of the chapter and you'll see several more different scenes and events before this chapter finally closes. And that's just the start of the roller coaster. So, hold on tight, because Mark will be taking us on a fast paced ride to see Jesus in action.

And as we look at Jesus in action in Mark, I want you to be asking a few questions. Ask, "Who is this Jesus?" Is he really the Son of God which Mark asserts in the first verse? Mark will show you that he is in so many ways! Also, ask yourself, "What is this Kingdom of God?" What is Jesus trying to tell us about this Kingdom of God and its significance? Mark will show you Jesus revealing the secret of the kingdom of God! Also, ask yourself, "What is discipleship? What does it mean to follow Jesus?" Mark will show you the cost of discipleship, but he will also show you the blessings of discipleship. And so ask those three questions as we study Mark: "Who is Jesus?", "What is the Kingdom of God?", and "What is discipleship?"

Turning then now to Mark chapter 1 - in December we looked at verses 1-15, so this morning we'll be looking specifically at verses 16-20 where Jesus calls his first disciples. Of course, seeing Jesus call his first disciples is another great sort

of introduction to this book. Because as we look at this calling of the first disciples, we cannot help but think about our own call to be disciples of Christ, and we cannot help but look forward to what the book of Mark will teach us about what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

And so look with me now at verses 16-20. Notice the unexpected setting. Here we find four ordinary fisherman that are called by Jesus. These are not the sort of people that you might think Jesus, the Son of God, would call for his first four disciples. Mark hasn't told us anything about these four individuals yet, other than that they are fisherman. But surely fishermen were not the religious elite, nor were they the politically influential, nor were they the experienced soldiers. This selection of his first disciples already begins to tell us a little bit about the kingdom which he just announced in verses 14-15. If Jesus' kingdom was about transforming the world in a geo-political way, we would expect that he would have called someone else. Instead, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 1 a few weeks ago, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1:28).

And yet Jesus will transform the world through these four disciples he is calling, not in a geo-political way; not by taking over civil governments; not by conquering the known world through military advances to impose the Christian faith by force. No, these four disciples, four of the 12 apostles, would be a part of the foundation of the NT church. As these four become disciples of Christ here in Mark 1, they would ultimately go to the ends of the earth to disciple others in the name of Christ. Just look at who these 4 fisherman are. There are two sets of brothers here Simon and Andrew, and James and John. Simon, who is more well known as "Peter," the rock, was clearly a leader among the disciples, and became such a leader all the more after the Lord's ascension. Andrew, his brother, we see in John, as one who was bringing people to Jesus. And James and John, brothers and sons of Zebedee, were known as the Sons of Thunder. These four seemed to be especially close to Jesus, and if there were an inner circle within Jesus inner circle of the 12 disciples, these four would be in it. In every list of the 12 disciples, these four are mentioned first. And so, though these four fisherman may not have been the kinds of disciples we would have expected Jesus to pick, we see the beauty in his selection - taking unexpected people and making them into pillars of the faith. Of course, it's actually quite amazing that Christ would call any of us to follow after him, because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But that is why he call's disciples - Jesus calls disciples that he then transforms by his grace and for his glory.

So we see here Jesus calling unexpected disciples, and we see here as well that this is an unexpected location and time for this call. Now to be fair, we learn from the other gospels that this does not appear to be Jesus' first encounter with these four men. These four seem to have already begun in some part to be learning from Jesus. In which case, this call would not be as out of the blue as it might seem here in Mark. Also, Luke's account of this call actually includes the details of a miraculous catch of fish to go along with this call to discipleship, which would also provide greater context to the call made to these four disciples. And yet in Mark's account he chooses not to include those details. Instead, in typical Mark fashion, the urgency and starkness of the call is emphasized, showing the unexpected nature of this call, and the immediacy of the response by these four men. Here we have four ordinary fisherman, fishing away like they normally do, when Jesus comes over to their workplace, interrupting their work and makes this call to them. There is something unexpected about Jesus' timing and location for this call. And yet, this is the way Jesus calls disciples. He calls them where they are at, in whatever their life situation is. His call comes unexpectedly, when we are carrying on with the ordinary ways of the world. But this sort of call

demands a response. This is how he called the first four disciples, and this is how he continues to call new disciples through the church and by the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. The Lord works in unexpected ways and in unexpected times in the hearts of people.

And of course even existing Christians, disciples who have already been called, can learn an important point here. God may call us to service at times that may seem inconvenient for us. How many of us like to be bothered at work today? Many of us probably get upset when our schedules and plans get disrupted. But God sometimes places things on our plates that are "inconvenient." As Christians, though we ought to make plans, we must ultimately submit these plans to God, and say, if the Lord wills, I will do this or that. As disciples, we must be discerning Christ's call in our lives to follow him and serve him, even in ways and situations that are inconvenient or require sacrifice.

And so notice with me now the call that Jesus is making to these disciples. In verse 17, he says "Come after me" or "Follow me". What was Jesus asking them to do? Obviously this a short statement. In Mark's account, we're not given any explicit details at this point of what this "following" of Jesus might entail. But clearly this is not a "can you come here for a moment" request. This was more than just a "let's grab coffee this afternoon" sort of request. Especially if we know from the other gospel accounts that these four already knew Jesus, then it seems fair to say that this call to them to follow after Jesus was more than just a casual request. Instead it seems a call to them for something deeper, a call for them to increase their level of commitment. Maybe up to that point they had already begun to sit under some of Jesus teaching and learn from him. But here Jesus is calling to them something more.

Just look at the promise he attaches to this call. Jesus promises that if they come after him, then he would be making them into fishers of men. And so Jesus' call to them was a call to training. He would be training them for a mission and a task. And when Jesus tells them that he would make them fishers of men, while he disrupts their own fishing of fish, he seems to imply a change in vocation. He seems to imply that following after him would mean a change in their jobs. He seems to imply that they would at least reduce, if not quit entirely, their current jobs as fisherman, so that they could become disciples of Christ and fishers of men.

And as we look at the rest of Mark, we see what this call for these four to follow after Jesus really meant. Later in this same chapter, we'll begin to see what this call entails. We see these four traveling all over with Jesus in verses 21 and 38. In verse 29, we see them have Jesus over to the house of Peter and Andrew. Later in Mark we see examples of the disciples learning privately from Jesus, receiving Jesus personal explanation of his parables, receiving teaching that the rest of the public did not.

And so this call that Jesus made to these four disciples to follow after him, was a call to discipleship. It was a call for a commitment to learn and be trained by Jesus. They were to follow him; he was to be their teacher, mentor, and leader. To be sure, they did not yet really understand that Jesus was both the Messiah and the Son of God. From the Gospel of John we see that they at least knew from John the Baptist that he was identified as the Messiah. But as we'll see in the book of Mark, the disciples will gradually learn more and more about who this Jesus really is! They were starting out on a pretty exciting journey with Jesus.

Now it might be helpful to make a distinction here. This event in verses 16-20 is the calling of these first four disciples, but it is different than them being

appointed as part the twelve disciples. In Mark 3:14 we'll see that Jesus at that time selects twelve of his disciples to be a part of his inner circle. These twelve disciples who would later be known as the twelve apostles would actually be sent out in Mark 5:7 to preach that people should repent and to cast out demons and heal the sick - doing the sort of ministry that Jesus was doing. At that point when they are sent out, they are already becoming fishers of men, as Jesus promised them here in Mark 1:17. And so Jesus' call to these four disciples, was not exactly his call to make them part of the official twelve disciples that he would later appoint them to. Yet, by promising them here that they would become fishers of men, Jesus clearly has in mind that these four would ultimately become part of Jesus' core twelve disciples.

Why do I mention this distinction? Well, there is a sense in which this calling of these four disciples is both a general call to discipleship and something more - something that looked forward to the special ordained ministry that is entrusted not to disciples in general, but to those God specially ordains. This means, that as we apply this text, we realize that there is both a general application to all believers and also a special application for those who have been called into the ordained ministry. Jesus calls each of us to follow after him. He calls each of us to discipleship. And for some he calls to labor full time in the ordained ministry.

And so let's think a little bit further about this promise Jesus makes to them. He says in verse 17 that he will make them become fishers of men. Obviously the term "fishers of men" is a metaphor, Jesus is speaking in language relevant to their situation. But Jesus is basically saying that they'll be learning to do what Jesus is doing. Jesus himself is a fisher of men. Fundamentally, we see Jesus preaching about the gospel of the kingdom, calling people to faith and repentance. Jesus illustrates his teaching of the kingdom even with miracles and signs and wonders, but fundamentally it all goes back to his teaching. Jesus is calling people into discipleship, into being citizens in the kingdom of God! Jesus is a fisher of people, calling them into discipleship. And that is what these disciples will do as well. They too will exercise miracles and do various signs and wonders, but they will fundamentally be preaching the gospel of the kingdom like Jesus. They too will fundamentally be calling people into discipleship. And we, the church, are those who have been "caught" -- to use the fish metaphor - caught by these disciples. We now, as a result of their ministry, have been enlisted as disciples of Christ.

And so notice then the response of these four disciples in verses 18 and 20. Both sets of brothers seem to immediately respond to Jesus' call to follow after them. We do not see any hesitation or doubt on their part. The master calls and they obey immediately. This was an act of faith and courage on their part. I'm sure they did not know exactly what they were getting themselves into. I'm sure none of them expected for things to turn out as they did. The result of their unquestioning faith here on the Sea of Galilee was probably not what they expected. If they did truly believe that Jesus was the Messiah, they probably thought much like the rest of the Israelites, that Jesus would bring in a glorious new earthly kingdom of Israel. Little did they know that they would have to watch Jesus, their beloved master and teacher, be crucified before their very eyes. Church history records that at least three of these men, Peter, Andrew, and James, died a martyr's death. Little did they know what was in store for them.

And yet already their response involved sacrificed. They both are described as leaving something, using the same word in Greek. Peter and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their father and the hired men. What each set of brothers left seems to illustrate the fact that the brothers were leaving, in some sense, their

livelihoods and their families. This doesn't mean that they left their families and jobs completely, never to see either again. But it does show that their discipleship would be demanding. It would involve cost and commitment. It would consume their time and energy.

And yet while we can praise the response of these four disciples, praising their faith and courage, and praising their sacrifice, this was only the beginning for these four. Though they showed some positive traits here in their initial response, the Gospel of Mark goes on to record that these disciples still had much to learn. Those of you who've heard the stories of the disciples before I'm sure can remember various stories of Peter, for example, who seems so brave and gung-ho, but often shows that his enthusiasm is a little misplaced. I think of Mark chapter 8, where one moment Peter is making this momentous confession that Jesus is the Christ and being commended by Jesus, and then the next moment Peter is rebuking Jesus because Jesus had predicted to them of his death and resurrection - which of course landed Peter a rebuking of his own from Jesus. My point is that these four disciples, though they show a good response here in Mark chapter 1 by courageously following Jesus, as we study at Mark, we will see that they still had much to learn. The Gospel of Mark will show that they definitely need to be disciples. At this point they had little clue about who Jesus really was or the sort of kingdom which he was bringing. They had little clue what it really meant to follow Jesus. In other words, they were spiritual infants at this point. But as they are disciplined by Christ, boy will they grow. Jesus hand picks these four disciples, and ultimately the twelve. Disciples that will show that by themselves they are ill-equipped to serve Jesus. And yet through Christ's discipleship, and through Christ's Spirit that he would eventually pour out upon them, he would do great things through these disciples. Though these disciples seemed the unlikeliest of candidates for Jesus' handpicked inner circle, Jesus had chosen them, to show that it was ultimately God's working inside them that would transform them into leaders. And make no mistake - it would be through these unlikeliest of disciples that Jesus would change the world. Think about that - the world is not the same because of these disciples turned apostles. God uses these four men and the rest of the apostles to literally change the world.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Jesus continues to call people to follow him. He says again today to all of us, "Follow me!" "Come after me!" When you hear him calling you today, through the preaching of his word, do not resist! Jesus is calling us to discipleship, through his church. He is calling us to a discipleship that is founded upon the apostles and their ministry, and ultimately upon Christ and his ministry.

Jesus calls some to especially serve as fishers of men - maybe that's you. Maybe he's calling you to one of the ordained offices of the church?

But to all people, he is calling you each to discipleship. As a Christian, he did not just call you to a one time act of faith where you just pray a sinner's prayer and then rest content in the forgiveness of sins. No, Jesus calls us to discipleship. Not in the sense of quitting your jobs, and leaving your families, and then shadowing your pastor all day long. That's not what I'm saying. But he is calling you to devote your life to learning Jesus' teachings and applying them your life. He is calling you to be mentored by Christ, which he does through his Word and Spirit, and through the ministry of the church. He is calling you into a relationship with him, where you learn about him, where you worship him, where you adore him and praise him, where you hear him and listen to him. Where you identify yourself with him because he is your Master and Lord, Your Savior and Redeemer, your Shepherd and King, the Lover of your Soul and your Best of Friends.

There are so many aspects of discipleship. So many ways that Jesus describes his discipleship. I think of John 15:5 where Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." This "abiding" in Jesus, is very similar to the idea of following after him. We must abide with Jesus and follow Jesus in all the ways he provides for us to do that. He is our source of success. He is the one who will grow us and use us. And so we must abide in him and follow after him using all the means he has given us. He gives us his Word where we can learn about him and his teaching. He gives us prayer, where we can pray to him, praising him, and also lifting our needs up to him. He gives us the Lord's Supper, where we were spiritually have fellowship with him. And he gives us fellow believers who are all a part of his body, who he gifts with his Spirit, to be a blessing to us and an encouragement to us. Make use of these things. This is how Christ disciplines us. Abide in them and by doing this, you are abiding in Christ and following after him. Through these things Jesus is training you and growing you in godliness.

And so I would urge you and plea with you today to make sure that you have really been a disciple of Christ. Maybe you go to church every Sunday. Maybe you know how to explain the gospel, and know all the right answers to Christian questions. But you know your heart. Are you actually living as a disciple of Christ? Are you actually striving, every day, to follow Jesus? I'm not talking just about external things. I'm not saying do you go to church and give your tithe. But I'm asking *internally*. I'm asking about your heart. Are you looking to follow Jesus, or is there something else in your life that is really your God? Is there something else that is really the master of your life? Is there something else that is really training you and guiding your through life? I ask this, because the reality is that some people go to church all their life and then one day realize that they were never really Christian. If that is you, or if is going to be you, I hope that today can be the day you realize that. And if you do realize that today, I call you to respond; I call you to "repent and believe in the gospel," and start today a life of following Jesus.

Don't think you have to become spiritual or godly in order to really become a disciple or to join the church. Christ calls people to discipleship where they are at, so that he can train you. He calls sinners just like you and me to begin this discipleship, not as perfect godly people, but only as people who come in faith and repentance. This is the heart of the gospel, that Jesus takes sinners and trains them in godliness! He takes the unexpected and does great things!

And yes, there is a cost involved with discipleship. I'm not saying that our salvation is by works - no our salvation is completely apart from our works, we've been saved by grace through faith. And yet as we unite to Christ by faith, and as we begin this road of discipleship, we recognize that there is a certain cost involved with following Jesus. Our response of discipleship will involve trial and struggle. Following Christ might mean making certain sacrifices. It might mean giving up certain friends who just want to lead you back into your old life of sin. Or it might mean witnessing to those friends and finding out that they no longer want to be your friend if you are truly going to follow Christ. It might mean turning down work on Sunday so that you can worship with and fellowship with your church family, which might even cost you your job or set you back in your career. It could mean all sorts of things. There's all sorts of ways which our following Christ could involve sacrifice and trial. And yet Christ does not disappoint us. Is there anything more amazing and wonderful than following Christ? Is there really anything that can compare with learning to know and love our Lord more? Is there any greater purpose and meaning to life? I don't believe there is.

Jesus changed the world through the twelve apostles. He continues to change the world with the disciples that he has throughout the world. And though you may not be an ordained officer of the church, as Christ's disciple you are growing, and that means that you too are also participating in the church's work to be fishing for men. So in a sense, we can all say that we, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, are called not only to follow Christ, but also to be fishers of men. What a great joy and privilege.

And so I invite each of you, as we start this series on the Gospel of Mark, to study together what it means to be a disciple of Christ and to follow after him. We'll see Jesus' twelve disciples learning this, and I am confident we all will learn this as well through the power of God's word. Amen.

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