

“He Calls My Name”

The Way of Jesus – part 2

Mark 1:14-20

(welcome, prayer)

[falls] In the spring of 2014, I took my two boys on a hike at Tahquamenon Falls. It was the early part of May, after a particularly cold winter, and there was plenty of snow still on the ground. As we got going, we didn't realize the river was flooded until we reached the halfway point of our hike. The trail was completely submerged. We had no idea where it was. After checking the GPS on my phone for a moment, I told my boys (6 and 8 years old at the time), “Follow me. We are going to take a shortcut back to the road. It's only a half mile away.” Believe me, it was the longest half-mile hike of my life. We went up and down ravines, through snow drifts, hopped over streams, and crossed the last 100 yards through six inches of swamp water. Bless my boys; they never doubted my leadership, even when our sneakers were soaked. When I said, “Follow me,” they did.

[two people walking] Why do you follow certain people? Usually, you follow people who are confident and trustworthy. People like my friend Jeff, from Oregon. One summer I lived in Maine, and Jeff was always the leader for our hikes. He was self-assured and able to laugh at himself when he got us lost. He assured us that we were taking the “Oregon Trail” even though we were in Maine! Some of his hiking skills must have rubbed off on me.

(My cell phone rings.) Excuse me. I forgot to turn this off.

You would follow a confident leader who had earned your trust. But would you follow a complete stranger? That is what Peter, Andrew, James and John did. And frankly, I find it astounding.

[boat] The Gospel of Mark tells us Jesus called these first four disciples from fishing from boats to fishing for people. Lake Galilee was and still is the center of a busy fishing industry. These disciples were making a good living, as evidence by the fact that Father Zebedee had “hired men” in addition to his sons. The parallel story in Luke 5 seems to indicate that Peter and Andrew were James'

and John’s partners. In other words, this was a good business, not just an occasional trip out on the canal.

Yet the first disciples literally dropped their lucrative fishing careers at Jesus’ first word. One commentary says, “At Jesus’ sheer command, ‘immediately’, the professionals drop everything and go....In a setting where poverty was prevalent, James and John’s...departure from their business would jeopardize their family’s livelihood and risk dissolution of the household: the basic social institution in which ancient Mediterranean economy was embedded. By contrast, [Elisha’s parents] at least received a good-bye kiss...when their son left the family farm to take up Elijah’s mantle and answer his mentor’s call (1 Kings 19:19-21).¹

[Disciples, boat and Jesus] There are so many questions that would have run through my mind if I had been one of these men. “How long do I have to follow you, Jesus? Where are we going? What are we going to do for food, money, and shelter? When will I get to see my family again? Will there be any ice cream along the way?” Jesus does not answer any of these questions. In fact, in Luke 9:3, Jesus specifically tells his followers not to take money, food, or clothing when they go out to minister. He tells would-be followers he has no place to lay his head. (9:58) Following Jesus is costly. Jesus himself said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (9:62)

[Why?] What is the question we are really asking? Isn’t it, “Why? Why should we follow Jesus? Why should we even trust him?” That’s what the gospel author is trying to tell us. Jesus had charisma. Jesus had power. Jesus had authority. At Christ’s baptism, God announced from heaven above, “This is my son!” (Mark 1:11) When Jesus asked the disciples to follow him and “fish for people,” they did it immediately.

Jesus, without speaking a word, knew these men. He knew their names. He knew their strengths and weaknesses. He knew they would not understand the kingdom of heaven and all of his parables. He knew they would fight with each other, and even abandon him before his crucifixion. Yet Jesus chose them. He called them. The disciples who would change the world.

¹ Abingdon New Testament Commentary-Mark

The thing is, these men could have said no. *(Let my cell phone ring, then hang up.)* Sorry about that.

[Disciples follow Jesus] These men could have said no to Jesus. It is one thing to follow a guide on a hike through the woods. It is entirely another thing to follow Jesus and dedicate your whole life to him. Yet I have to believe, as surprising as this whole story is, if we could go back in time and ask Peter, Andrew, James and John, "Was it worth it? Was it worth leaving everything to follow Jesus?" I know they would say, "Yes." Most of the disciples were martyred because of their faith in Jesus. Their lives, and their deaths, stand as testimony that they never regretted their decision.

What does it mean to follow Jesus today? Is it worth it for us, too? Maybe it is not as radical as leaving your house, your job, and your family to wander around the country. Then again, maybe it is. We know missionary families whose experience has literally been that, don't we? And even if you don't change careers or your address, following Jesus is a life transformation that is costly by worldly terms.

[verse] I want you to think about this. The word "Christian" literally means for "little Christ." The Bible says in Acts 11:26 that "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Just a few years after Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the early disciples and their followers were behaving so much like Christ, they were ridiculed for it! What were they doing? They were loving. They were praying. They were worshipping. Believing. Trusting. Giving. They were cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit, following Jesus' example so closely that other people called them "little Christs." "Hey, there goes Jesus! No, wait, that's Steve." "Over there, that's Jesus! No, wait, that's Jane."

This is what being a Christian means today, too. To follow Jesus is to reflect his life and values closely, to actively practice our Christian faith in love, word, and deed, to the point that people know without a doubt the Lord we serve.

(Cell phone rings again.) I am so sorry. Someone keeps trying to call me.

[Jesus heals] Jesus offers us restoration of our souls. Jesus offers us peace. He offers us eternal life. Purpose. Joy. These things are priceless. No one would

deny that they want those things in their lives. So why do so many people say no to Jesus?

Some are too busy. It comes down to priorities. Following Jesus is no casual fad. It is costly, in time, energy, and money. For some, that price is too high. They are focused so much on themselves that they miss all that Jesus has to offer.

[church] But I think there is another reason, something that as the Church (with a capital C), we have failed to teach. We have depersonalized the call. It is no longer Jesus saying, “Follow me,” but we think it is an institution saying, “Join us.” Hear me out. I love the church. I love this church. But sometimes our thinking goes like this: “The pastor wants me to follow him. The church wants me to join them. But they don’t know me.”

[crosses] Discipleship has never been about the institution. It is about Jesus. No, the whole church might not know you, intimately, on a personal level, in a deep-down-in-my-soul way. It’s possible that one or two members of this congregation have that kind of relationship, but not one hundred of us all at once. The Church with a capital C doesn’t know you. But Jesus does. He knows all about you; through his power, he created you. He knew your eye color and how tall you’d be before you were born. He knew what your favorite flavor of ice cream was. He knew your hopes, dreams, thoughts and fears before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139) Jesus knows everything about you! There is nothing about you that can scare or embarrass or deter Jesus. He calls you by name. *(Cell phone rings again. I hang up and ignore it.)*

[title] If my kids are asleep in the morning, and I want them to get up, I have two options. I can yell through the house, “Kids, get up!” which probably will have little-to-no effect. But if I go into each of their rooms and say, “Jonah, it’s time to get up,” ...“Lucas, it’s time to get up,” ...“Emily, it’s time to get up,” I usually get a better reaction. That’s what we need to learn to do as a church. We are not calling someone to join a faceless institution. The church is the Body of Christ. Jesus calls your name. He says, “Come, follow me. Let me teach you to fish for people.” That’s a call I want to answer.

(Cell phone rings one last time.) It’s for you. Jesus is calling.

(prayer)

In response to God's word, let us read this affirmation from 1 Timothy.

Memory Verse: Mark 1:17

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Reflection Questions:

1. Who are some leaders you have followed in your life? Why did you follow them?
2. Have you ever had to leave something valuable behind because of a life-altering decision? (Work, house, family.) What made you do it?
3. What does it look like in your life to follow Jesus? How do others know you are following Jesus?
4. If you have never answered Jesus' call to become his disciple, take a moment right now and pray to him.