

Sermon for Sunday, January 24, 2021

The 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany: Mark 1:14-20

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I wonder what the disciples heard in the Good News proclaimed by Jesus that day at the Sea of Galilee. This question plagued me in preparing this sermon, and I think it was significantly due to the sheer simplicity of Mark when compared with the other Gospels. Seemingly the earliest Gospel written, Mark doesn't have many of the bells and whistles of other Gospels which flesh out the general story of Christ's life. Take this call story for example. I think in the calling of these initial disciples, other Gospels have a bit more going on explicitly. I concede that Matthew uses much of the same story, but the Gospel of Luke seems to entice the disciples through Jesus' miraculous power as he sets this call story alongside the miracle of the fishes as Jesus fills disciples' empty nets with countless fish. The Gospel of John gets particularly direct and literally has John the Baptist point at Jesus saying "Look, the lamb of God!" which is good enough for our four fishermen. For these other Gospel accounts, I would kinda get why Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John would be interested in following Jesus. But Mark....Mark and his account I have found somewhat confounding.

You see as Mark's vision begins, Jesus has just endured his 40 days in the wilderness and the temptations of the devil when he meets his would-be disciples. He rolls out of the desert into Galilee and in the span of 5 verses, Jesus recruits Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John, 4 out of the 12 disciples, literally a third of his ministerial crew. Jesus shows up on the scene, says, "Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people" and they drop their nets and get going. Heck James and John don't even get a line of dialogue from Jesus, Mark just says Jesus calls James and John and they follow him.

The text says only this with regard to Jesus' direct interaction with his newly recruited disciples, but I believe the brevity of Mark here serves a purpose. Rather than highlight a reason to follow Jesus couched in the supernatural such as Jesus' power to catch fish or his identity as prophesied by John, I think Mark emphasizes the power of this man's character and more importantly, the power of the message he brought with him of God's Kingdom and of the Good News. So again, I wonder what the disciples heard in the Good News proclaimed by Jesus that day.

In search of some sort of answer I looked to biblical commentaries and historians earnestly searching for further background on life in Galilee under the Roman Empire, what social status fishermen had, I tried to calculate the average income of the disciples by looking at the average cost of fish in ancient galilee before I thought maybe I was missing a possible reason for why we don't get more from Mark. Maybe it's important that we don't know exactly why these disciples chose to follow Jesus in that moment. In fact, maybe we don't need to know the specifics because

maybe the Good News was just as intimate and personal to the disciples as it is to me. Or to you. (by the way, a lb of good non-marine fish could get you 12 denarii, which sounds pretty good). I thought about what the disciples might have needed to hear from Jesus, what hope he might have brought them in their boats that day. And instead distantly, of what the disciples heard from Jesus' good news, I have now wondered what do I need to hear? I've wondered how have I felt despair and needed to be comforted? Where have I seen injustice and needed to believe that justice can be served? Where have I believed that my life is certain and sure and in need of change? How do I need this Good News? How do you?

As much as I wanted to define Jesus' Good News and its impact on those disciples, I think it is not unlike God, God's self, in that Jesus' Gospel defies codification. The Good News is as free and alive and adaptable to the needs of our lives and of our world, to the needs of the suffering and stagnant of our present as it was to the present of those four fishermen.

I wonder how exploring the possibility of your life, the ambiguous mystery of the Good News, might invite us to be free as the Holy Spirit, free enough to cast aside our own nets and live into new hope and possibility. I think that the Good News invites us to believe that we need not codify our lives as this or that either. We can aspire to be as free and hopeful as the Good News itself. Perhaps Mark wanted us to know that Jesus' Good News was as specific to the needs of those four fisherman as it is meant to be specific to you and what you need.

Again, what Good News do you need to hear? Listen. Amen.