

BECAUSE JESUS SAYS SO

Mark 1:14-20

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Series B)

January 21, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 1, verses 14 through 20. In this gospel lesson, Jesus calls his first disciples and promises what they will become. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 1, beginning at verse 14, we read in Jesus' name.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**”

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “**Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.**” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus commands complete devotion from you. Do you know that? When we read about the apostles leaving everything and following Jesus, that is not only his will for them. It is his will for all people. It is his will for you. And it is his will for you because it is good. It is good, just in general. It is good for the world. And it is good for you. Jesus commands complete devotion from you.

You might think, *Yeah, I believe in Jesus. He's important to me. But there are other people who are more extreme about it. And that's okay for them, but it's just not for me. I don't want to be a radical.* That thinking is wrong.

We might have an attitude that discipleship or our Christian life is part of our lives, and it might even be a big thing, but it's not the most important thing. That's wrong.

Or we might even consider devotion to Christ as the most important thing, but there are other important things too. That is, Jesus might get 40% of our devotion, something else, like our families, gets 30%, work gets 20%, and a couple other things get 5%. Don't worry about the math. I checked it, and it comes out to 100%.

But Jesus doesn't want to be a fraction. He's God. And he redeemed you with his holy and precious blood. He doesn't deserve to be a fraction. Jesus' expectation and command is that he would receive 100% of our devotion. The great command of the Old Testament is that “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and will all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). The key word is “all.” Jesus affirms that this command still holds true (Matt. 22:37-38; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27-28).

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You might think, *Well, that's just not reasonable. If I give 100% of my devotion to Jesus, then there's nothing left for my family. Surely, Jesus would want me to give part of my devotion to them, right?* Of course. If something is good, and if God desires you to devote yourself to that thing, it's inside the 100% that God requires. Love and devotion to the people God calls you to is love and devotion to him. So when Jesus says that love of God is the great commandment, he says that the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). This commandment is *like* the great commandment. It is not in addition to it, but we love God by loving the people he has placed around us. That is part, and a big part, of loving God with all our heart, soul, and might.

So, yes, Jesus really does command our complete devotion. If we balk at this, if we say, "Yeah, but there are other important things too," what we're really doing is putting ourselves at number one. We're probably just hiding behind these "other important things" in order to maintain control over our lives without the direction of our Lord. Do you see what I mean? If we keep these "other things" outside of our devotion to Christ, then we are the arbiters of what's important instead of seeing all things under the lordship of Jesus.

This also means that to love a person means to love them the way God commands us to love them. We don't get to define what love is. When we define it, we are tempted to make love out to be whatever we want to do or are willing to do. But love, to truly love our neighbor, means that we do what God commands. So it means giving to the needy (Gal. 2:10; James 1:27), but it also means refusing to give anything to the one who refuses to work (2 Thess. 3:10). It means husband and wife expressing intimacy (1 Cor. 7:5), but it means the unmarried exercising self-control (1 Cor. 7:8-9). It means providing for your children and being gentle with them, but also disciplining them and forcing them to do things they don't want to do. Love is not treating other people the way they want to be treated. It is not doing with them what we want. It's not doing for them what we think is right. It is treating them God's way and doing what God has commanded.

So, for example, if you are raising children, you are not doing this as a separate activity from your service to Jesus, but this is part of your service to Christ. That means that every diaper you change, every meal you prepare, and every consequence you enforce is a service to our Lord. It also means that you must be teaching your children the Word of God and raising them in the fear and discipline of the Lord.

Or if you have employment, or if you are in school, or in any activity, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col. 3:23). This does not mean that every single activity needs to become an act of evangelism. If you make shoes, you don't have to stamp a little cross into all of them. But you should make it the best shoe possible. Great shoes are helpful to our neighbors, and God is pleased with this.

When we see our entire life as service to Christ, there is both an encouragement and a call to greater devotion. The encouragement is that we realize that many of the things we already do, things that we might just see as ordinary tasks, like raising children, going to work, being a decent friend and neighbor, are really services to Christ. That, I hope, is an encouragement to you. It should make those tasks more fulfilling. And there is also a call to submit everything to the authority of Jesus. That means being diligent when we want to quit. And it means opening our mouths to speak the Name of Christ.

When Jesus called Simon and Andrew, and then James and John, they dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus. It's very abrupt. We get the picture of Simon and Andrew's boat just sitting there on the beach. We wonder what Zebedee, the father of James and John thought

of the whole thing. Mark paints a picture of abruptness, and it is. But it's not quite as strange as we might think. If Mark's gospel were all we had, we might even think that these disciples had never met Jesus before, like some strange guy just comes up and tells them to follow him, so they do and never return to their lives. But that's not really the way it was. It was abrupt. They did not hesitate. But they had also met Jesus before, and they knew that he is the Christ. The other gospels fill in some of these details.

From John's gospel, we learn that Andrew, at least, was a disciple of John the Baptizer, and John introduced him to Jesus. Then Andrew introduced his brother Simon to Jesus, and he introduced him as the Messiah (John 1:35-42). That, of course, was before John was arrested, which we learn from our reading today happened before Jesus called these fishermen.

Then we learn from Luke's gospel that Jesus performed a miracle on this occasion by giving them a very large catch of fish, so large that their nets began to break. We also learn from Luke that Andrew and Simon were partners with James and John. So they knew each other and worked together. And the region of Galilee, where they all lived, wasn't that big. It's extremely unlikely that James and John didn't also know Jesus before being called.

So Mark paints it as being abrupt. And it is abrupt. But it's not like these disciples just drop their entire lives to follow some random stranger. They knew who Jesus is. And they didn't leave their fishing business completely unattended. Zebedee, the father of James and John was still there, along with a handful of employees. And the gospels have more stories about Jesus and his disciples in boats on the Sea of Galilee (e.g., 3:9; 4:1, 35-41; 5:21; 6:45-52). There's even another fishing story (John 21:1-14). They did not leave their families, they did not even give up fishing, but they followed Jesus as their first and only priority.

We learn from all this that discipleship under Jesus does not mean that we neglect the other good things in life. But they all fall under the authority of Jesus, and there they have their greatest meaning. Jesus calls us to love the people he has placed in our lives. Occasionally I hear about some guy with a wife and kids, who abandons them in order to go on a mission across the world or follow some cult leader. They consider the cult leader to be the real deal, but he calls them away from the good things God has called them to. I suppose they think they are doing the same thing that Simon, Andrew, James, and John did. But they're not. Jesus did not take them away from their families.

Later in Mark 1, we see them all in Simon and Andrew's house, where Simon's mother-in-law was ill. Presumably, his wife was there too. They didn't just leave. But discipleship under Jesus became their first and only priority. Every other good thing was placed within that discipleship.

Here's what Jesus called them to: he called them to **"become fishers of men"** (1:17). Jesus called them to become evangelists and apostles. We probably read this as a command. **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."** And there is a command here. **"Follow me,"** is a command. But the other part is really more of a promise: **"I will make you become fishers of men."** Jesus tells them what will happen when they follow him.

These disciples spent the next three years learning from Jesus. They travelled with him. They heard all his preaching. They asked him questions. They witnessed all his miracles. They became preachers of the Gospel. And then, after Jesus' death and resurrection, their work as apostles and evangelists really took off. They preached the Gospel, and, by the thousands, people believed the Gospel and were baptized. They became fishers of men. Why? Because Jesus said so. Jesus told them what would happen, and then it did.

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This reveals the power of Jesus' word. What he says becomes reality. This is the same God who created the universe and everything in it simply by speaking. In next week's gospel lesson, we will see Jesus cast out an unclean spirit simply by speaking. It's like Jesus' words are a spiritual lasso that grab the spirit and yank him out. Even evil spirits, the enemies of Jesus, are bound to obey the words of Christ. What he says becomes reality. So these four men become fishers of men, because Jesus says so.

It is the will of God that people would hear the Gospel and be saved. It was the will of God, all the way back then, that you would hear the Gospel and be saved. That's why Jesus called these men to be fishers of men. He wanted you to hear the Gospel and be saved. He wanted you to hear the good news that Jesus Christ was crucified for your sins and rose from the dead on the third day. He wants you to hear the promise that your sins are forgiven and you will also be raised to live with Christ in the new creation forever.

Jesus called these men to preach, because he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). He does not call all people to be preachers, at least not publicly. But he does call some. He may be calling you. We should pray for him to call more. But even if he does not call all Christians to be public preachers, he does call you to be a preacher of the Gospel in some capacity. It may be to your friends or neighbors. It may be to your children. If you have children, it certainly is your vocation to teach them the Word of God, and especially the good news of Jesus crucified and risen for them.

This means that we must learn the Word of God, like the disciples learned it from Jesus. The word "disciple" simply means "learner." Jesus calls you to be his student. And it means that we must be willing to open our mouths and confess the Name of Jesus. And we should be inviting people into Christ's Church.

Think of the life Jesus called these disciples to. He called them to follow, learn, and become preachers. He also called them to suffer.

Jesus, himself, knew that he would suffer. John the Baptizer had already been arrested. And then Jesus began preaching the exact same thing John had preached. Imagine this. Imagine seeing someone get arrested for doing something good. So then you go and do the exact same thing. Jesus knew that he would receive opposition. He knew that he would be crucified.

Jesus also knew that his disciples would be persecuted. Almost all of his disciples were murdered for preaching the Gospel. At the moment Jesus called them, he knew how it would end for them. So imagine Jesus, when he calls Simon Peter to follow him, with the image of Simon being crucified upside down. And Jesus calls him to that. Simon doesn't know this yet, and Jesus doesn't tell him, not yet anyway. But he does eventually teach his disciples that they will be hated and persecuted for his sake. And he calls them to this.

Would you do that? If you have children, and you could see into their future and see them murdered for confessing the Name of Jesus, would you still teach them? Would you want that for them? I know this might be a disturbing thought, but consider it for a moment. Would you rather they live a long and peaceful life without Christ? Or would you rather they learn the Gospel and suffer or even be killed for it? We should all choose the Gospel, because the very same Gospel we may be killed for promises that we will be raised like Jesus from the dead.

Jesus calls us all to follow him. He calls us to be his disciples. He calls us to a life of complete devotion.

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Now if you know your own heart, even just a little bit, you know that you can't give 100% to anything, or, at least, not anything outside of ourselves. You could be 100% devoted to yourself. That's easy. But to give our devotion to someone else, that's hard, even when we know that it's 100% worth it. I know this, and I think you know this. When I tell you that Jesus calls you to be 100% devoted to him, I know you won't do it, and I know I don't do it.

So if you're a well-trained Christian, you might be thinking, *This is the part where you tell me that Jesus forgives me for my lack of devotion.* And that's right. He does. If we were actually capable of giving him 100% devotion, there would be no need for him to be crucified, and there would be no Gospel for us to believe and teach. So, yes, Jesus forgives your lack of devotion. He forgives you for not loving him with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might.

And there are two ways we might go with that, a wrong way and a right way. The wrong way is to say, "Okay. I'm off the hook, and I don't really need to worry about being devoted to Jesus." That's wrong, and it's just plain stupid. Why would you give no love and devotion to the God who purchased your soul with his own blood?

The other way to go is to rejoice in this salvation and recognize that devotion and obedience to Christ is absolutely worth it, regardless of how hard it is or how much suffering we may endure. Jesus calls us to devotion, faithfulness, love, and obedience, because it is good. He knows that it is good, just in general. He knows it is good for the people around us. And he knows it is good for us.

So follow Jesus. Learn from him. Obey him. Trust that the God who gave his life for you will not lead you wrong. Amen

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.