

“PROJECT ANDREW”
Mark 1:14-20
January 21, 1028
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION:

Mark’s gospel starts without much of an introduction.

In the first 12 verses, we are introduced to Jesus.

First, Mark tells us of John, the forerunner to Jesus.

Next, Mark tells us of Jesus being baptized by John.

Then Mark tells us briefly of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness.

Then, without telling us why or how, John is arrested

And Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee.

The forerunner’s job is done, and Jesus announces,

‘It’s time!’.

And the message that Jesus is preaching is simple –

Yet it is succinct and poignant:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God

has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Such a simple message – yet so very powerful.

If you get the chance to listen to some of Billy Graham’s sermons,

Listen for that same simplicity.

That simple message has converted millions in the past.

Jesus comes upon Simon and Andrew, fishermen,

And He called to them:

"Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

**In Jesus' day
the Sea of Galilee supported a substantial fishing industry
that exported fish to Egypt and other distant locations.**

**While some fishermen would practice subsistence fishing
(fishing primarily to feed their own family),
there would also be substantial export trade.**

**Some fishermen would be poor—most would be comfortable—
and some would be quite prosperous.**

**We are not told the economic status of Simon and Andrew.
We are told they left their nets and followed Jesus.
Immediately!**

Something extraordinary is going on here.

**I don't think you could walk
through downtown Eureka Springs, preaching:
"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come
near; repent, and believe in the good news."
and convince *anyone* to close their shops
and commit their lives to following Jesus.**

**Surely the fishing for Simon and Andrew
wasn't that bad!
It's fishing! How bad can it be?**

**One year, very early in the spring,
I was fishing the Taylor River above Gunnison.
The ground was covered with about 2 feet of snow.**

**A howling wind came whipping down the canyon.
It was so fierce that it kept blowing my fly right off the water.
The snow was stinging my eyes so badly I couldn't see.**

Did I quit?

Oh no! It was fishing!

Didn't matter that I was not catching anything.

**If, at that moment, Jesus came walking by
and asked me to quit fishing and follow Him,**

I might have said yes . . .

if he had a flask of hot chocolate with him.

Maybe.

And then Jesus comes across James and John, sons of Zebedee.

**Apparently, their fishing company was large enough
to warrant hiring help.**

And Jesus' invitation had the same effect:

They immediately left to follow Him.

WHY FISHERMEN:

Now, I have to pause for a moment and ask the question:

**why did Jesus choose his first four Disciples
from among fishermen?**

**From the first person to catch a fish,
those who fish have a very intricate dance with the truth.**

**Their stories are always embellished a bit –
the fish are a little bigger than they actually were –
the fight with the fish gets more fierce with the telling.**

And, of course, there is always the one that got away.

Why fishermen?

Not because Jesus belonged to the same union as the fishermen,

For Jesus was a carpenter.

**Why not seek priests and rabbis,
politicians and wealthy patrons,
outstanding leaders in the community?
People of integrity and influence?**

**Maybe it was because these folks were from Galilee
And Jesus shared a common heritage with them.**

**Maybe Jesus knew fishermen to be hardworking,
patient in their pursuit of fish.**

**One thing for sure –
this was a major disruption in the family business!**

**To lose two brothers from each enterprise
would negatively affect the bottom
lines of the business they left behind.
To say nothing of their families.**

**This is a pretty strong indication that Jesus was not *inviting* them to
come follow Him,
Jesus was *calling* them – a direct call from God.**

**God doesn't always call those who are well prepared;
but God always prepares those who are called.**

**According to our standards of recruiting talent,
These fishermen would not have been our first choice.
But Jesus saw their potential –
as He sees the potential in us all.**

**The spiritual enormity of this event
Gets lost in the brevity of the reporting.**

**If John Grisham had written Mark,
we'd overhear a little dialogue between Simon and Andrew
concerning Jesus.**

**Stieg Larsson would have accompanied James and John
through their morning routine.**

**Patricia Cornwell would have clued us into the rumors
that attend Jesus' arrival.**

**Even Luke provides a little story that explains
why the disciples find Jesus compelling.**

**What we are not told,
is Jesus' four new disciples lived in a tough world.**

**Jewish aspirations for freedom
confronted the grim reality of Roman imperial exploitation.
Families lost their land.**

**Children scattered in search of work and opportunity,
often finding themselves enslaved by poverty.**

**Traditional family and village structures crumbled
under enormous cultural and economic stress.**

**A very few people amassed incredible levels of wealth in Jesus' day,
while countless others found themselves destitute.**

THE CALL:

Here's the spiritual richness Mark has not included.

**Apparently, Jesus sees something worthwhile in these four men—
not necessarily what they are but what they could be.**

**Apparently the four men see something compelling in Jesus—
something that causes them to walk away from
that which is precious and familiar to follow him.**

It is a major sacrifice.

**These men did not seek to become Jesus' disciples.
They had begged him to accept them as students.
It was Jesus' initiative, not theirs.
God chooses whom God chooses.**

**He picked people probably much like you and me.
Furthermore, his disciples were anything but perfect.
Many times they misunderstood him.
They often hesitated to follow him.
Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him.**

**Yet, they followed Jesus,
with no idea of where it would lead.**

**These would be the persons
who would continue Jesus' work on earth after he left --
ordinary people, like you and me.**

**They were called to let go of everything that they know
so that they can step out onto a pathway
that Jesus will show them—
a pathway not defined for them in advance—
a pathway not understood until they have walked it.**

**That's real discipleship—
faith to step into the unknown,
trusting Christ to lead us to the right destination.**

OUR RESPONSE:

**Let's take a closer look at the message Jesus was preaching.
"Repent, and believe in the Good News" (v. 15b).**

**We tend to think of repentance as feeling guilty,
but it is really a change of mind or direction—
seeing things from a different perspective.**

**Once we begin to see things rightly,
we might feel bad about being wrong—
but repentance starts with the new vision
rather than the guilt feelings.**

**So the first part of the message is to get a new vision –
to grasp what Jesus is asking of us.
to turn away from false gods of our own making.**

**The second part of the message
is to "believe in the Good News" (*euangelion*) (v. 15c).**

**To believe is to be convinced that something is true—
to trust it—to have faith.**

**Belief makes it possible for people
to live confidently in the midst of difficulty.**

**Belief makes it possible to keep moving forward
toward seemingly impossible goals.**

**Belief makes it possible for us to step out into the darkness,
certain that God will give us sure footing.**

**Jesus calls us to drop our old priorities
and take up Jesus' new priorities.**

To stop building and storing in our own barns,

and start building and investing in God's kingdom.

**We are called to stop fishing for our own benefit,
and start fishing for Jesus.**

**Our calling is to leave behind our own lives,
even being willing to leave behind life itself.**

**We are called to believe and follow Jesus the Messiah,
the Son of God.**

We are called to be disciples

and to make disciples.

**Since in Jesus everything is given *to* me,
in Jesus everything is demanded of me.**

**The four disciples' willingness
to throw in their lot completely with Jesus
illustrates that attitude.**

CONCLUSION:

Everyone has a station in life, a "calling."

Maybe even several stations in how society functions

**Every job that works to build up and maintain society is a calling --
teacher, insurance salesman, car mechanic, politician, etc.**

**We also have callings within family structures –
mother, father, aunt, uncle, child, etc.**

We serve God in these family callings as well.

Lots of motives influence people who exchange their old lives for new ones. Harsh new economic realities are forcing people to retrain, restructure and reorganize. Even Mitt Romney says he knows the fear of the pink slip. Countless people are leaving their old lives — or finding their former lives slipping away. What commitments convince us that they are worth living for?

And some people abandon their nets because they hear good news worthy of our lives. If things were just fine in the world, perhaps they'd stay with their nets. But sensing God's kingdom drawing near, they reshape their lives in response to God's call. They drop everything and go another way. Far too few churches ask this question, this vocational question, of their members: to what life is God calling you? And far too many of us domesticate the question, as if Simon and his colleagues were just volunteering for a single night at the winter shelter. The realities of our world press us with questions greater than how we'll spend a given night. Meanwhile, the kingdom of God lies right at hand. And what about those nets?

Scholars believe this is not the first time Jesus has met these men. Perhaps these fishermen had either seen the baptism of Jesus or had heard about this strange man who came preaching “good news” and had been tested for forty days in the wilderness.

THE MESSAGE:

But the object of our belief is critical. People believed in Hitler, but Hitler betrayed their trust. His legacy was shattered lives and rubble. People believed in Mao with similar results. Extremist religious beliefs drive most of the world’s terrorist activity today. Any number of people believe in money or power.

But Jesus calls us to believe in the Good News (*euangelion*). The Greek word *euangelion* combines the words *eu* (good) and *angellos* (to proclaim—related to our word angel, because angels were God’s messengers). In the New Testament, *euangelion* means the Good News of Jesus Christ.

That might sound like spiritual claptrap, except that we have seen how belief in Jesus Christ has transformed lives. One of my favorite stories has to do with an alcoholic who became a Christian and was able, by the grace of God, to quit drinking. His old drinking buddies made fun of him. One of them asked, “Do you really believe that Jesus turned water into wine?” The new Christian thought for a moment and then replied, “I don’t know whether Jesus turned water into wine—but I do know that, in my house, he turned beer into furniture.” The stories of lives transformed by belief in Jesus are legion—and true.

Simon and Andrew are from Bethsaida (John 1:44), probably located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee east of Capernaum.

Jesus “saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen” (v. 16b). Jesus sees them. They weren’t looking for him. Their attention is focused on the task at hand—casting their net—hoping for a good catch.

Casting a net into the sea involves a large circular net with weights fastened around the edges and a draw rope to trap fish. Nets of this type are still used in some parts of the world, and it is a thing of beauty to watch a skilled fisherman cast such a net. Larger fishing operations would use a boat and dragnet. Some scholars contrast Simon and Peter (less affluent brothers who cast a net) with James and John (more affluent brothers whose father not only owns a boat but also has hired hands—v. 20). However, Luke 5:3 says that Simon owns a boat, so this contrast is probably overdrawn.

“Come after me, and I will make you into fishers for men” (*halieis anthropon*) (v. 17). Gender-neutral versions say, **“fish for people”** instead of **“fishers for men.”** While “people” meets today’s gender-neutral standard, it does so at the expense of poetic charm. I must confess that one of my favorite songs as a child was, **“I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men. I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.”** That, of course, was another century—another millennium—but I feel cheated not to hear children singing it—and go through the motions that accompanied it.

“Come after me” (v. 17b). The call is personal—an invitation to follow Jesus rather than to join a cause. Most rabbis expect aspiring students to seek permission to follow, but the initiative here is with Jesus. He chooses his disciples rather than waiting to be sought out by them. Jesus’ call is also different in that he calls them, not to follow the Torah, but to follow himself (Edwards, 49).

The brothers Simon and Andrew, and the brothers James and John, stop doing what they're doing and start following. They themselves repent, believe and follow. They turn from their old priorities and turn to make Jesus their number one priority. Now Mark will show us time and again, most notably right in the middle of his gospel that this repenting, believing and following at this stage is the equivalent of the partial healing of the blind man, and it will only be after the resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit that the circumcision of the heart will occur, the full healing of sight will come about and the full turning away, believing and following even unto death will occur.

The text gives us no clue to what is going on inside their heads at such a strange proposal. There was no preparation. The only note we get from the text is the second occurrence of "*immediately*" (Greek, *euthus*) in the Gospel of Mark as Simon and Andrew "*immediately* leave their nets and follow him" (1:18). All we can say about the call is that "the kingdom of God" has broken into their lives in the immediacy of Jesus' call. There are also two other fishermen on the shore mending their nets, James and John, sons of their father Zebedee. The call of Jesus to them is the same and their response is the same. They leave their livelihood and their father and "*immediately*" follow this stranger (1:20).

“fishers for men” (*anthropon*—men, humankind) (v. 17b). Some scholars believe that **“fishers for men”** involves gathering people for judgment, because the Old Testament uses the fishing metaphor in that sense (see Jeremiah 16:16; Amos 4:2).

The context in Mark, however, makes it clear that Jesus is calling these men to an evangelistic task. They, like Jesus, are to proclaim the Good News—the Good News of the Kingdom of God—the Good News of Jesus Christ who is ushering in the kingdom. These four men will invite people to make God their king—to submit to his reign (Geddert, 57).

“Immediately (*euthus*—one of Mark’s favorite words) they left their nets, and followed him” (v. 18).

“and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him” (v. 20b). Like Peter and Andrew, James and John hear Jesus’ call and leave their father to follow Jesus. The detail about Zebedee remaining in the boat with the hired men illustrates the suddenness with which James and John make their decision and follow through on it. The point of their quick departure is the compelling nature of Jesus’ call.