

Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 21, 2018
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Mark 1:14-20.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15) "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" 16) As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17) "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 18) At once they left their nets and followed him. 19) When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20) Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Dear friends;

Just the facts – that’s what we have in our text for today – the bare facts surrounding Jesus’ call of Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him. Mark doesn’t tell us about the crowd that gathered around Jesus and how he used Simon’s boat as a pulpit from which he preached his message of repentance and good news. He doesn’t tell us that after his sermon that Jesus gave orders to Peter to let down his nets for a final catch of fish. And that although Peter was less than eager – he did as he was instructed and the nets were filled to point of breaking and two boats to the point of sinking. Frightened and afraid because of his sinfulness – Peter fell to his knees and said – Lord, go away from me; I am a sinful man. But in his grace the Lord Jesus refused to listen to Peter – instead he assured him; *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."* (Luke 5:10 NIV)

It’s so easy to get so excited about the large catch of fish reported in Luke’s Gospel that when we read Luke’s account we might miss the bigger miracle and the greater evidence of God’s grace which was part of the days’ events. The catch of fish which Luke describes is secondary to the miracle described by Mark in our text. Mark’s “just the facts” account describes how Jesus miraculously caught Simon, Andrew, James and John as his disciples just as he has caught us.

In his grace *Jesus calls to you: The Kingdom of God is Near!*

1. *You have been called to repent and believe the Good News*
2. *You have been called to follow Jesus*

14) Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The action of this text revolves around Jesus coming to Galilee. Our attention is initially directed to what happened following John’s imprisonment when Jesus came to the region of Galilee. Jesus came to Galilee to proclaim the Gospel (good news) of God. He did not come with a political message or a message of prosperity. He came to announce the fulfillment of God’s promises to send a Savior. He came with a message that addresses a universal need – the solution to sin. The Kingdom of God is near. That’s good news. That’s the Gospel of God.

The devil tried to thwart the Gospel message of the coming kingdom of God when Herod had John the Baptist arrested but God’s plan and message could not be stopped. The ULTIMATE prophet arrived on the scene to continue proclaim and to fulfill the message of John. Just as his fore-runner, John the Baptist did, Jesus came to the region of Galilee calling people to repentance and faith. **15) "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"**

The coming of this kingdom was made necessary because of the fall into sin. So it does not surprise us to hear Jesus echo the prophet’s calls for repentance and faith. What is new here is that the one who is now

proclaiming the message of forgiveness and salvation is the Savior himself! The message is timeless. Because Christ has appeared and completed his mission, I can say to you as a servant of the Lord: "The time is completed and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

When Jesus calls on us to repent, he wants us to look back at our sins and to understand that our sins have placed us outside of the kingdom of God. That will fill our hearts with fear and sorrow. That's why Jesus also assures us that the Kingdom of God is near. He has come to restore our place in God's family to us by undoing our sin and sacrificing his perfect life on the altar of the cross to remove our guilt forever. That's the good news that he invites us to believe. Now, with our sins removed by his grace, we turn to the Lord and live for him. That too is part of what Jesus had in mind with the word, repent.

We might say that repentance involves a turning away from sin (in sorrow and contrition) and a turning to the Lord – and a life of service to him. Paul captures the second thought well when he writes: ***"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 6:11 NIV)

Repentance and faith are not demands of the Law. They are gifts of grace. ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9) not by works, so that no one can boast. 10) For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*** (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)

Jesus calls us to repentance and faith through his Gospel in Word and Sacrament – bringing us into his kingdom since God now rules in our hearts and lives. We have been called follow Jesus. Jesus has revealed his Messiahship and the power of his Word by persuading us to forsake our sins and to follow him. Every time any sinner is moved by the Spirit to hand his heart to the Lord, the power of Christ is revealed. That was true also of the men in our text for today.

16) As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17) "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 18) At once they left their nets and followed him.

Simon and Andrew were already familiar with Jesus and his preaching at this point in time. That helps us, in part, to understand why they would now be willing to set aside their fishing nets – their income and way of life and to follow Jesus' invitation to train them to become fishers of men. It would take them some time to experience and really understand what Jesus had in mind for them. But in faith they were willing to follow his call.

In time they would discover that their "catch" would not be snagged and sold. They would be involved in a catch and release program. They would rescue their catch and set it free! Their new net would not be made of weights and twine but of the Words of Christ – the gospel – the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Just think of everything they would see, hear and learn until Jesus left them in charge of his business with the command: ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:15-16 NIV)

Our text gives evidence of the power of Christ's word when it reports that immediately or at once they left their nets and followed him. They obeyed not because they were so righteous, bold or daring but because of Christ's mercy. They were chosen, called and convinced by the power of his word! We also have been chosen, called and convinced to follow Jesus by his word. But what's involved with following Jesus?

The Scriptures describe the life we have been graciously called to live in a variety of ways. We could describe it as a life of sacrifice as Romans 12:1 does: ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.*** (NIV)

But it's not just offering our bodies to the Lord. It's offering our entire being and our entire way of thinking and living. ***Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*** (Deuteronomy 6:5 NIV) Jesus explains: (Matthew 6:19-21 NIV) ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

It's offering our boats and nets – our business and wealth – for the Lord purposes with the confidence that he who provided them to us in the first place will never leave us in need. Such a life of sacrifice involves not just offering our self and our possessions. It also involves our relationships. Again, let Jesus explain: ***"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*** (Matthew 10:37 NIV)

Our relationships with family members are important and Jesus would not have us abandon them completely: ***And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.*** (1 John 4:21 NIV) But love for a family member may require us to point out their sins in an effort to win them for Christ. That in turn may lead them to turn away from us and to reject us. Such rejection would fall into the category of a cross that we would be carrying for the sake of Christ and our relationship with him who carried a cross for us – that we might be spared the pangs of eternal punishment. Jesus says: (Matthew 10:38 NIV) ***Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.***

Here's a good place for me to remind you once again of the fact that it is only Christ's righteousness which makes us worthy to be called God's children. That righteousness is ours through faith in Christ. The commitments we are talking about are expressions of our faith. They are part of the calling that we have received as heirs of eternal life as Peter reminds us.

(1 Peter 2:21 NIV) ***To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.***

What example has Christ left for us? It's the example of his holy innocent life – a life in which he was committed to doing his Father's will. He committed himself to rescuing us from our sins and from eternal death. In Philippians 2:5, the Lord reminds us: ***In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*** (NIV) Ephesians 4:32 expresses this thought in a practical way: ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*** (NIV)

So far we've seen that following Christ means sacrificing and giving ourselves to the Lord, bearing crosses for the Lord and following his example. When Jesus called Simon and Andrew to follow him he promised that he would make the fishers of men. He was calling them to share in his work! The same was true when Jesus called James and John to follow him.

19) When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20) Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Jesus had the one thing needed – the Gospel of God. That is what compelled James and John to leave behind family and occupation to follow Jesus. Jesus' call changes lives.

Often the “sacrificial nature” of following Jesus is emphasized. But that's not the complete picture. It is true that Simon and Andrew, James and John would leave all to follow Jesus to be trained for full time work in the Lord's kingdom. But was it a sacrifice for them? Were they missing out on something? Jesus came that we might have life to the full! (cf. John 10:10) Even carrying a cross for Jesus is gain for us.

One way to speak of the call that Christ has extended to us is by saying he has called us to a life of total commitment. Another way is to say that he has called us a life of glorious service. The life that Jesus promises is a life of glorious service. He's set us free from our slavery to sin and error. We're no longer controlled by our sinful nature. He's provided us with the freedom to live for him. We no longer have to struggle to try to earn God's favor – which as you know would be impossible. God is pleased with us. Our sins are forgiven because of what Jesus has done for us. ***And whatever [we] do, whether in word or deed, [we can] do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*** (Colossians 3:17 NIV)

Our life of glorious service begins in this life time and by God's grace to us in Christ it will continue for all eternity in the glorious perfection of heaven. During this life time our service is far from perfect – even our righteous acts are as filthy rags. (cf. Isaiah 64:6) This reminds us once again that our life of service is but a response to the Lord's grace. Christ's righteousness has been credited to our account.

Not only does the Savior call us but our Savior promises that he will give us the strength we need so our crosses will not overwhelm us but bring us closer to him. To live a life of commitment and service to the Lord means placing ourselves completely into his hands – body and soul. In the process the Christian will live abundantly now and eternally in glory with our Savior hereafter. What a glorious display of God's grace and the power of Christ's Word!

Theme: Jesus calls to you: The Kingdom of God is Near

- 1. You have been called to repent and believe the Good News*
- 2. You have been called to follow Jesus*

Amen.