

Fishers of Men

- Mark 1:14-20
- Many years ago, one of England's leading actors was asked to recite for the pleasure of his fellow guests. He consented and asked if there was anything special that his audience would like to hear. After a moment's pause, an old pastor who was present said: "Could you, sir, recite to us the Twenty-third Psalm?" A strange look passed over the actor's face; he paused for a moment, and then said: "I can, and I will, upon one condition; and that is that after I have recited it, you, my friend, will do the same." "I?" said the pastor, in surprise. "But I am not an actor or even a good speaker. However, if you wish it, I will do so." Impressively, the great actor began the psalm. His voice and his intonation were perfect. He held his audience spell bound; and as he finished, a great burst of applause broke from the guests. Then, as it died away, the old pastor arose and began the psalm. His voice was not remarkable; his intonation was not faultless. When he had finished, no sound of applause broke the silence—but there was not a dry eye in the room, and many heads were bowed. Then the actor rose to his feet again. His voice shook as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the old clergyman and said: "I reached your eyes and ears, my friends; he reached your hearts. *The difference is just this—I know the Twenty-third Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd.*
- Knowing the shepherd. That's what the Gospel of Mark is aimed at, and today as we see Jesus start his ministry, let's think about it under two main points: Proclaiming the Gospel, and Calling Disciples.
- **Proclaiming the Gospel (vs. 14-15)**
- After John's arrest, which we will read more about later in this gospel, Jesus began to preach. He went into Galilee, the northern region of Israel, where he grew up, "proclaiming the gospel of God." The message he preached, as recorded by Mark, was simple but life-changing. In fact, I believe it is the first message a sinner will ever really "hear." Because this message, when truly heard, opens the ears of the man or woman without Christ. It opens the eyes. It opens the heart. Or I should say, God opens the heart, but he uses the Gospel message to do that. Remember in Acts 16, when Paul and Barnabas came to the city of Philippi, and there they found some women, one named Lydia, gathered by the river. They spoke to the women, and the Bible says, "The Lord opened (Lydia's) heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." Unless there is an open heart, ears to hear, then as Paul wrote, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14) The Gospel opens ears, opens hearts, and the difference between a natural man or woman and a spiritual man or woman is they have received the Gospel. What was the message Jesus proclaimed?
- **"The time is fulfilled."** This had two meanings. One, the time was fulfilled for Jesus. It was the time that had been prophesied about and had been in the heart of God from before the foundations of the world, the time when Jesus would come to redeem his people. It was also the time for those who truly "heard" the message. The word for time here is not chronos but kairos. Jesus had brought the period of prophecy to an end and came to fulfill those prophecies. Kairos means a critical or opportune moment, and for

each of us in Christ, there was a kairos moment, a critical time when God opened our eyes and our hearts to finally hear the truth and change our minds. Why? Because...

- **“The kingdom of God is at hand.”** The world thinks of a kingdom as a geographical area over which a monarch reigns, but Jesus brings in a new understanding. The kingdom of God, Sinclair Ferguson writes, describes an activity: “God’s reign over his people and his world.” The people of Israel were looking for a king who would rule over a geographical place, but God installed Jesus as the King who would call men and women into a new kingdom, and this King would subdue the forces of the kingdom of darkness, and would exercise authority over the forces of nature, and would rule over sickness and disease and demonic activity. And best of all, this king would offer forgiveness of sin, and through his own sacrifice make a way for sinners to be cleansed forever. I want to be a part of that! Don’t you? How then do we enter this kingdom?
- **Repent and believe in the gospel.**
- I have good news and I have bad news. The bad news first. The bad news is that the first thing we have to do is repent, and that means to stop in our tracks and turn around. It means to stop living the way we are living. It means to stop pursuing our own kingdom, which is where all of us are from birth, and stop living every day as though we are on the throne of our lives. It means to completely abandon our old self-centered way of life and live the new life of a subject to the new king, Jesus. Why is this bad news?! Because it is absolutely impossible. Because “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to (our) own way.” -Isaiah 53:6 Bad news for all of us!
- Unless...and here is the good news. Unless you believe in the gospel. You see, repentance can never exist on its own. It must be accompanied by faith. I cannot turn away from sin unless I turn TO Jesus. When we truly receive the good news of the King, that he has come to make us new, to offer us forgiveness, to set our feet on a new path, to help us live a life that pleases God...when we believe in the gospel, then we are able by God’s grace to abandon our selfish efforts to rule over our own lives and establish our own little kingdoms. The Gospel is GOOD news. We see that happen with Zaccheus, the wee little man who ruined other people’s lives by his selfishness and greed. Zach was completely toppled from his throne when he met Jesus. He believed and repented, and Jesus made him a new person in every way. The greatest taker became the biggest giver because he was no longer his own king. We see that in Legion, a man controlled by demons, cutting himself and raging at everyone who came close, and then completely changed when Jesus the King stepped off the boat and into his life. The greatest terror in the ten cities became the greatest evangelist, when he believed and repented.
- **Calling Disciples (vs. 16-20)**
- The king came to gather people into his kingdom. He started with two, and ended with 12, but that was just the very beginning. He continues in 2020, and thousands enter the kingdom of God through repentance and faith every single day.
- Jesus was walking on the beach. Great place to walk, and the women at the retreat will get to do that in less than three weeks. Much of Jesus’ ministry was along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Beach ministry. I have to confess that most of the time when I am at the beach, I am not looking for disciples. I am looking for rest. A good book. Sometimes shark’s teeth. Also fellowship with my family, or with my brothers from Antioch when we are at the men’s retreat. Jesus had a different purpose, and he calls us to join him in

that! You will hear later in the service about the days in January when David Ball and I went to Moldova to make disciples. We were calling men alongside us to hear about how they can lead themselves, lead their families, and lead their communities. Look at what Jesus did in calling disciples.

- His first disciples were fishermen. The Sea of Galilee is seven miles wide and 13 miles long and was a center for commerce in first century Palestine. Many men made their living by fishing, and most of them did so with nets that were 20 feet in diameter and had heavy bars or rocks attached to the perimeter. With practice, a fisherman would learn to throw it from the boat or just while wading in the water so that it fanned out to its full size and landed as a perfect circle on the top of the water, quickly sinking to the bottom and trapping fish inside it. The fisherman would then dive into the water, gather up the edges without letting any fish escape, and drag it to the boat or to the shore. Jesus would have been very familiar with this, though he grew up as a carpenter 12-15 miles from the sea. He saw Simon, whom we also know as Peter, and his brother Andrew, fishing in this manner, and calls to them. Three things about that call.
- **First, Jesus was the caller.** And he was different from every other rabbi in his day, because he called disciples to himself. The other rabbis would never do that, but the initiative had to be taken by aspiring students who would call out, if you will, to a rabbi. Jesus still calls disciples to himself. Like you and me.
- **Second, Jesus simply said, "Follow me."** This was different from anything you see in the Old Testament. The prophets and the judges, even the kings, did not call people to follow them, as a rule, but to follow God's ways, to walk in his statutes. Jesus comes along and calls men to himself. Jesus alone has authority to call men and women to follow him, and him alone. When many followers left him late in his ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:66-68) Notice two important things in Peter's response: "To whom shall we go?" We each, ultimately follow someone. As Bob Dylan sang, "You're going to have to serve somebody." Make sure that person is the Holy One of God. Then Peter said: "we have believed, and have come to know." Repentance and faith leads to knowledge and greater faith, which enables us to stand when others all around us are falling away.
- **Third, Jesus says, "I will make you become fishers of men."** Discipleship is ultimately about others: we are disciples who make disciples. Of others! Then Jesus says, "You will *become*." The process of discipleship is painful. And long. It is not easy to understand, and follow, especially in times of trial or persecution. But the better we come to know the Shepherd, the more we trust him. And the more our lives are made useful to others in their own faith.
- Notice their response: immediate surrender. Immediate obedience. NOT immediate sanctification. No! That takes a lifetime, and we will see Peter stumble in many ways, just as we do. But these men had to have repented and believed in the gospel, or they could not have left everything to follow Jesus. Then Jesus goes on a little farther, and he is not alone now, he has two men with him. But he makes the same call to two more fishermen brothers, James and John. And they leave their father and follow Jesus.

- These men left much but gained everything. All of them was now at the disposal of Jesus Christ. They were called to discipleship, which is also a call to community. When we are called to Jesus, we are called into community with him, and with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are also called into community with one another. Those four men, especially Peter, James and John, would be the core group of the 12, and the 12 would be the foundation of the church. Except for Judas, who left Jesus to pursue the world, which is the opposite of discipleship. These men would serve Jesus together, with their families, all the way to the death. And the church was built upon them as the foundation, with Christ Jesus the cornerstone.
- Questions: Are you becoming a fisher of men? It means that you have repented and believed in the gospel. If that is true, then where are you in the “becoming” process? God calls us to leave everything this world promises to follow Jesus. We leave behind our addiction to self, our lust for fame and fortune, our wrong beliefs about earning God’s approval through righteous works, our dependence on others to make us happy or fulfilled, our stubborn pride and our paralyzing fears. What do you need to “leave behind” to follow Jesus more closely? By God’s grace, you and I can take another step today toward becoming a fisher or men and women.
- Prayer