



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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Beginnings
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 25, 2015

Mark 1:14-20

A Sermon by Brent J. Eelman

Six years ago, we received a phone call from our daughter in Washington D.C. She announced that she was planning to leave her job. I immediately went into "panicked" father mode.

First I started with the questions: "Are you sure this is a good idea? Don't you think you should take some time to think about this? Isn't this kind of soon? You have only been there three years."

Then I quickly moved to the possible consequences: "You will lose your healthcare coverage."

And then the advice: "I don't think this is a good idea.... "

Karen managed to stop me before I became the "dogmatic dictator dad", telling her what to do.

Parents will understand my reaction. Our daughter was three years out of grad school. She had a very good job. She had benefits. She was able to fend for herself. I was worried that she would end up on "my payroll" again! It turned out ok... Better than ok, and I have to admit that she made a good decision for herself. But I learned from that encounter that fathers are always fathers. That experience has given me a new perspective on the story of Jesus' calling his first disciples. All I can say is, "poor Zebedee!" Mark wrote: "Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him." They "up and left him!"

You can imagine the questions that were on his mind:

"Who is this guy Jesus and what kind of control is he exerting over my boys?"

"Why so quickly? What is the urgency?"

"Is this some kind of cult?"

"What is wrong with fishing?"

Let me ask you: On the surface, do the actions of Simon, Andrew, James and John sound responsible to you?

There were some pretty big implications for those four men who were called to follow Jesus. Think about what they left behind. James and John left their father and the family business! They all left their livelihoods. They left what little security they knew. They left the life that they knew. They left their comfort zones. Zebedee, the father of James and John must have been scratching his head in wonder... and so should we! Yet we sing the old Sunday School hymn, "Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult... saying Christian follow me." Do we appreciate the depth of Christ's call?

This morning I would like to look at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the church today. First I want to examine the biblical story within its context. Second I want to explore the urgency which characterizes this text and Christ's call to us. Finally, we will ask the question, "Does Jesus still call us in the way he called Andrew and Simon, James and John?"

I

The text: Mark's gospel is the briefest of the four gospels. He did not waste words. He only wrote what he thought was essential. In Mark there is no Christmas, no angels nor magi, no manger nor shepherds. Consider the 13 verses that precede this morning's text.

- Jesus was defined as the Christ, the Son of God.
- John the Baptist was introduced.
- Jesus was baptized.
- Jesus experienced the wilderness of temptation.

The context for this morning's text was the arrest of John, (for what we do not know). This was a warning. Preachers beware! Mark was telling his readers that proclaiming the gospel is risky and dangerous. There are consequences! John was arrested. Then in one sentence Jesus proclaimed the essence of the Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Then Jesus put legs to his message by calling the disciples, Simon and Andrew, James and John.

He will be with these disciples throughout the 3 years of his ministry. They will accompany him in his travels. They will be present when he preaches and teaches. They will no longer drag their nets catching fish... no! They will now fish for men. Just as they were called to discipleship, they too will announce "the time is near, the Kingdom is at hand, repent and believe." They too will be arrested, and only one would enjoy a "natural" death.

This is also the story of the church: the gathered people of God! We are the heirs of this story. The gospel has been proclaimed to us. We can substitute our names for Andrew and Simon, James and John. It is the story of Brent, Karen, Bill, Robbin, John, Fred... indeed all of us here in this room. It is the story of Poland Presbyterian Church. We are here because Jesus called us. Christ's call is the beginning and the foundation of our common life and work.

II

The call of Jesus to discipleship is an urgent call. The first four disciples experienced the urgency of Jesus call. They left their nets and followed. Why the urgency? It was the arrest of John the Baptist. Things didn't look good for those who proclaimed another kingdom in the Roman Empire. Consequently Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom is near." **Now** was the moment to act. **Now** was the moment to gather others, and multiply the messengers of God.

Timing is essential. It is essential to discipleship. And just as Jesus challenged the fisherman to "follow me," he challenges us today. There is an urgency to Christ's call to discipleship. Why?

- There are people who are hungry for food.
- There are people who are hungry for hope.
- There are people who hunger for comfort.
- There are people who suffer loneliness.
- There are people who need shelter.
- They hunger for "good news" of salvation.
- They hunger for the love of God in Christ.

These are the ones who Jesus would call, "the least of these." They are God's people, and they need to hear that God's kingdom is at hand. Christ's call to his 21st century disciples is urgent. It is, truly, a matter of life and death.

William Martin has written:

There are two questions that need to be answered in order to move along the path toward God. One could spend a lifetime just considering these two questions and answers.

- *The first question is, "What time is it?"*
- *The second question is, "Where are you?"*
- *The **only** correct answer to the first is, "**Now!**"*
- *The **only** correct answer to the second is "**Here!**" **

Christ is speaking to Poland Presbyterian Church... This is the beginning. **Here** and **now!**

III

Jesus call us to discipleship, even today. I fear that the contemporary church which bears Christ's name has diluted his call to discipleship. We hear the call of Christ differently. We act as though he approaches us and asks, "I am looking for twelve volunteers to give me a hand at the church." If we are not too busy... "Sure, we can give a hand."

I am aware that the church is a "voluntary" organization, but the one we serve never asked for volunteers! He only said, "Follow me." It is a radical call. It is an urgent call.

The church of Jesus Christ needs disciples. Ones who with Simon and Andrew, James and John, will sense the urgency of that call, leave their nets, and follow. It is a struggle. It is for me. I know what my "nets" are. They are those things that I want to cling to. Those habits and toys that I want to hold on to. Those practices that dilute commitment. Those things I don't want to leave by the lakeshore. (I am a fisherman!!) What are yours?

The place is here. The time is now. This interim journey which we begin together is truly an adventure. There are a host of technical and structural challenges which we will address together. This is all part of coming to terms with our past, discovering our 21st century identity, and preparing this congregation for a long and healthy pastorate in the future. We will do these things, but Poland Presbyterian Church needs disciples for this task.

- Disciples who hear the call of Jesus and answer, "Here I am, Lord!"
- Disciples who have the moral courage to leave their nets by the lakeshore.
- Disciples who will dare to care for others.
- Disciples who are willing to commit to loving their Lord and follow Him.

The place is here. The time is now.

One of my heroes is Albert Schweitzer. He was, in the best sense of the word, a "renaissance man." He was a biblical scholar, a philosopher, a theologian, and one of the best organists in all of Europe. He could do and be anything he wanted. At the age of 40, he gave up the life of scholarship and performance to study medicine. Then he traveled to the Congo of Africa to build a jungle hospital and minister to the people suffering there. I have always wondered why and how he could do that. The answer, I believe, is in the concluding paragraph of his book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*.

Let me share it with you.

*"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to **us** the same words: **"Follow thou me!"** and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. **He commands.** And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."*

Members and friends of Poland Presbyterian Church, Jesus calls us, "Follow me."
The place is here. The time is now.

*Martin, William C. *The Art of Pastoring: Contemplative Reflections*, p. 2

**Schweitzer, Albert *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, emphasis mine.