

## “Whose Calling?”

### Mark 1:14-20

When the weather is in the minus degree – most of us long to escape the cold by traveling to warm places. I myself would love to go to a sunny destination where I could just relax and bask under the sun. Today we are given that opportunity to enjoy the hot summery weather where Jesus calls the first disciples. Come and join me along the seashores where we meet Jesus and the four fishermen. I imagine the air smelled of salt, seaweed and fish as Jesus walked the shores of the Sea of Galilee that day. Jesus’ invitation to Simon, Andrew, James and John sounds like a spur-of-the-moment. “Follow me. Drop whatever else is occupying your time and come with me to a life full of adventure. Listen to what I have to say. Follow me and experience life in a different way. I will make you fishers not of fish but of men and women— you will become fishers of people.”

Immediately, (a favourite word of Mark) the four dropped everything and follow. Had the fishing been really bad that day because their nets kept coming up empty? Was the net-mending especially tedious and boring? Or maybe the heat and humidity were all but unbearable? Were James and John desperate to get away from their family business? So that when Jesus invited them, they jumped at the chance to leave their monotonous life? Were they looking for a good excuse to stop being fishermen? Maybe they figured fishing was a dead-end job with little chance for advancement or extra income and Jesus came along at just the right time? Or had they heard rumors or reports about Jesus, about his powerful preaching? Maybe they had heard him themselves, even grew up with him and the thought of knowing him as a Rabbi, becoming one of His disciples, was irresistible? Or perhaps they were intrigued with the words, "I will make you fish for people!" Certainly – these words are quite intriguing! In our lectionary group this past Tuesday, several ideas were put forth as to what this verse means. Some agrees that the term *Fish for people* –implies *transforming relationships by serving others*. Jesus calls each one of them into relationship with each other, with God and with all the various people they will meet the rest of their lives. Others think that this is used by some fundamental Christian churches to reel in or catch people to join the church – a conversion method to introduce them to Christ. But the most interesting interpretation was the one offered by Susan Young. She said that perhaps Jesus was asking them to be the “fish for people” – food for the journey. They are instruments in giving abundant life for others especially when they are under a foreign occupation that exploits their

resources and make them second class citizens. You might add a new perspective to these explanations.

Why should Simon, Andrew, James and John follow someone who uses such difficult metaphors? Perhaps if Jesus' sales pitch had been, "Come – I'm offering you 50% more of the minimum wage and make more money than you could ever make fishing," then it might make more sense. But this immediate invitation and immediate response seem unlikely. They dropped what they were doing and headed off to God-knows-where; to lives they didn't even have a clue. So the questions we might ask ourselves are these: why did they follow Jesus? What kind of calling did Jesus offer? Who was Jesus as a leader that the four men follow in a whim? Some contemporary biblical scholars insist that Jesus had actually been living in Capernaum for a while and had known the four fishermen for some time. They could have been drinking buddies or maybe have attended community events and occasions together. And so this call was neither sudden nor abrupt but was the natural outcome of their friendship or moments of acquaintance.

What is it about Jesus that hooked the four men? To answer this question, I am using Marcus Borg's insight in his book, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. Borg describes Jesus in 4 positive strokes which I will use as my sermon themes in the upcoming season of Lent.

1- **Jesus was a spirit person** – one with an experiential awareness of the reality of God. The fishermen found Jesus as a spirit person who refuses to let the world squeeze him into its mould; A gentle and radical spirit, filled with humility and kindness, but also with fire and passion who chooses to live life against the Roman empire, instead of living comfortably under the patronage of empire and reaping its benefits.

2- **Jesus was a wisdom teacher.** The disciples might have listened to Jesus taught and preached using parables, aphorisms and short sayings to teach people how to live a just and righteous life. His language was most often poetic, metaphorical and imaginative filled with memorable sayings and compelling stories. They found in him dramatic public actions and ate meals with the untouchables which not only generated criticisms but symbolic of his alternative human community.

3- **Jesus was a social prophet** – a reformer as such, he was portrayed as criticizing the economic, political and religious elites of his time. He was an advocate of an alternative, often looked at as subversive social order and was often in conflict with authorities. He called the ordinary folks as

well as the intellectuals – the affluent and the impoverished alike – the sinners and the saints – the well and the sick to a life of risk-taking yet spiritually rewarding.

And 4- **Jesus was a movement founder** who brought into being a renewed and revitalized crusade that challenged the boundaries of his day leading to the formation of the early Christian church. Now this particular description of Jesus as a movement founder was an afterthought - a positive result after he was murdered and crucified. Jesus himself did not know nor was in his agenda to be an instigator of a movement. Being a Jewish man himself who was immersed into the Jewish culture and way of life since birth, he was passionate about a loving God and interpreted the law in his first century context. It was his followers many years after he died that began a movement in his memory based on his teaching and example. It was through the leadership of women like Mary Magdalene and Lydia and men like Peter and Paul that made Jesus a movement founder. They were the followers of the Way – the soil in which Jesus planted the seeds of love, justice and compassion.

Jesus' leadership emulates both transformation and servanthood. No wonder Simon, Andrew, James and John dropped their fishing nets and followed him. Jesus as a leader begins with a vision of God's dream for the world. He not only communicates the vision, but models it for others. He walked the talk. He came and announced this vision, which was the arrival and coming of a new reign of God that was unlike the Roman Empire. In the new reign, leaders and kings were servants and not lords, the poor were blessed and not cursed, women, children and slaves were included in the community and it operated from a platform of love, justice and compassion. He sought to invest himself in the lives of the people so that, as a whole, the community is challenged to grow as welcoming and inclusive. The disciples stepped into Jesus' footsteps and were literally baptized into his life, death and resurrection. They became salt and light in the world.

Just like the four fishermen, we too sometimes are faced with questions and speculations of our own calling and sense of direction. How is Jesus the leader calling you? "Now hold it," you may say, *"I've been a member of the church for a long time in fact I was baptized in this very same sanctuary. What do you mean, is Jesus calling me? I come to church regularly and take part in the sacraments. I volunteer my time and share my talents and treasures – is that not the same call coming from Jesus?"* It sounds onerous at times, but Jesus' call comes not just once but calls each of us over and over again. The calling comes in many forms. There are calls to a vocation, or change of careers. There are calls to a particular place, to a specific faith community. There are

calls to a task, and there are calls to stop what you are doing and find renewal for your tired spirit. There are calls into and out of relationships. There are calls to healing and calls to let go of your worries. There are calls to regret what you have done, to repent and make amends for your wrongdoings. And there are calls to stop regretting, to accept the fact that you are forgiven, that you are healed, and get on with your life.

Do you ever wonder why some of you say “yes” to agreeing sitting on boards or committees, teaching Sunday School, greeting people by the door, singing in the choir, doing fund-raising or being a circuit messenger, to name a few? What could be your reason for stepping forward? I’m sure you did not literally hear Jesus calling you to be his follower. But I am certain that you have been inspired by the stories of his leadership – parables of faith that might have impacted your life and have been encouraged in doing something worthwhile. Some felt compelled in sharing their time, talents and treasure because doing something for others becomes their living creed or a way of making their faith alive. Others recognize that this is part of their mandate as Christians, that they must walk in the steps of Jesus and should emulate his way of living. And maybe the best reason for doing so is because most of you believe in the power of good stewardship.

Jesus calls us to a world where opportunities are vast, where there are relationships to be mended, where people hungry for God are waiting. On this first Stewardship Sunday, if you are pledging your time, your talents and your resources to the visions of this congregation, thank you! No amount given is too outrageous or too small; for surely our dreams and visions in this faith community and beyond are made possible by our faith in God who lavishly gives and blesses in return. To follow Jesus as our leader also means that we cannot predict what that decision will lead us to. We call it a “leap of faith”. The famous writer Joseph Campbell has pointed out that every great story, every great quest begins with a call to adventure. The hero is called to follow a path, meet a challenge or begin a quest that will forever change their identity. And for Jesus, all great adventures start with a call. For Simon, Andrew, James and John, for you and me. So, as we hear Jesus calling to us: “Follow me, and let the adventure begin!” Let us confidently respond in the same manner as Samuel taught us last Sunday: “Speak Jesus, for your follower is listening.” Amen.

Sources I used for this sermon:

1. BCUC Lectionary Group
2. Marcus Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.
3. Melissa Bane Sevier, Left Behind, <https://melissabanesevier.wordpress.com>
4. McShane, S.L., Von Glinow, M.A. (2005). Organizational behavior 3d ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. New York, NY.
5. Fritz Wendt, Politics of Inauguration and Surrender.
6. Linda Yates, Answering the Call of Duty”, Observer Jan 2017.