

## **Come, Follow Me**

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Preached at the San Dimas Community Church  
United Church of Christ  
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Third Sunday of Epiphany, Mark 1: 14-20

**Our scripture lesson this morning is disturbing because it leaves us with many unanswered questions; yet, we seem to be satisfied with metaphorical inferences that do allow us to receive responses to our questions. This, however, is disturbing because if we don't have the answers, in the first place, how can we be sure that the responses to the metaphors are correct? Further, how can we really be sure that Mark is writing in a metaphorical way? We cannot be sure; still, I believe that Mark is pointing to something beyond the story that demonstrates what our responses to Jesus should be.**

**May I suggest that the Gospel is about change. Mark is telling a story about a radical transformation that can come to human beings; and, if men and women respond to that change, the social character of the whole world can be spiritually refashioned.**

**That means that when the call is given, the response must be immediate. There will be no time to cogitate on family and job, health and finances, food and housing. Complete trust must be given to the divine call-giver, even in so-called "no-way-out" circumstances. There is an old saying in the African American community, "God will make a way out of no way." I believe that this is what Mark has in mind when he introduces us to Jesus.**

**It is difficult for many people to imagine that Simon Peter and his brother Andrew would drop their nets and follow Jesus. It appears that they had a profitable fishing business. The same is true of James and John the sons of Zebedee. They quickly left their father and followed Jesus.**

**The Reverend Cynthia Anderson of the United Methodist church in Barrington, Illinois says that she is astonished that neither set of brothers raised a question (CC, Jan. 13, 2009). This doesn't surprise me. I am not astonished. I believe that there is more to the story than that which Mark gives us.**

**I ask you to meditate with me on the story and its implications as understood by the members of the early church. We shall be on a hermeneutical—or interpretational—journey of faith. We are trying to learn more about this Jesus whom we confess. We are at the third Sunday in the season of Epiphany**

and we wish to gain more knowledge of the one who is proclaimed and who proclaims.

Mark begins his gospel by introducing us to John the Baptizer who proclaims that a person more powerful than he is coming and he, himself, is not worthy to bend down and untie this person's sandals. John certifies this person's power by revealing that he baptizes with water but this person baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Mk. 1: 1-8). Thus we have Jesus proclaimed, even though Mark does not introduce him until verse nine of chapter one.

Then suddenly in this morning's scripture, we are told that the Baptizer is arrested. We are not told what happened to his followers. However, can we get a sense of what happened to them from reading chapter fourteen in the case of Jesus' arrest? It says, "All of them deserted him and fled." O yes, I'm sure that some of John's disciples fled when he was arrested.

In all probability, many of John's followers did not fully understand his message of repentance and redemption. They wanted a Messiah who would come as a mighty warrior for the redemption of Israel. This did not happen; so when John was arrested, they fled to the heretofore mundane things in their lives.

They, however, must have at sometime met Jesus or heard about him. Was he not an itinerant preacher like their leader John? Jesus and John had similar messages. Following John's arrest, Jesus stresses more forcefully the message of change. He addresses the issue of fulfillment: This is the moment. This is time. Jesus now becomes the one who proclaims.

The message resonates with folk everywhere. What manner of man is this that even with the arrest of John, he is still willing to disrupt the status quo and preach a message of change? What manner of man is this who gives people hope for a bright tomorrow? What manner of man is this, indeed? Jesus was a man who urged change and exhorted people to believe in the good news which was to come. When they became doubtful, he shouted, "Yes we can."

He takes his message to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter and Andrew hear the message again for the first time. This time it is infused with hope. Jesus says, "Come, follow me." They drop their nets and follow. Further along the shore, James and John also hear the message again for the first time. It is infused with hope. Jesus says, "Come, follow me. This is the moment. This is the time." An epiphany takes place. Their lives are changed. They drop their nets and follow.

**You can see how the scripture reverberates with our time. For two years, everybody in this nation has been talking about change. I do not know for whom you voted. I don't really care. I do want you to understand, however, that change is risky business. I hope that you with me will allow ourselves to be open to the challenges that this Season of Epiphany has for us and our country.**

**I hope too that each one of us can have an epiphany of what God would have us do and be in this nation's risky challenging time. We should be willing to spread the message that a still-speaking God is concerned with peace and justice, poverty and homelessness, and love and reconciliation of the whole world. We are needed to make sure that as God speaks, the message is being heard. Our new president bids us to follow him. We are asked to take risks and be agents in refashioning our country and the world. This is the moment. This is the time. Yes we can!**

**Now what about all that metaphorical stuff? Surely we can find metaphors of fishing, nets, and getting out or staying in the boat. Whether we can find metaphors or not, we are reminded by The Reverend Anderson that an important thing to remember is that "following Jesus is life-giving and transformational—but we don't get to draw the map or have our questions answered before we start walking. We have to listen for Jesus' call and take the first step." This is the moment. This is the time. Jesus calls, "Come, follow me?" Yes we can!**

**Let us pray.**

**O God, help us to not only face change in our own lives, but also to be change-agents in the lives of others. Guide us as we answer Jesus' call to follow him and dare to refashion the world. For Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.**