

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Epiphany - Year B

47th Sunday of Pandemic

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62:5-12

I Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

01/24/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Disciples**

Good morning! Four years ago I poured my heart and soul into a sermon on this text. But apparently it wasn't a very good one because nobody at Sunday school remembered it. Alas, hopefully I will do a better job today.

I have a problem with this text. Not because of anything in particular with the Gospel lesson itself, but because of all the history that seems to have been built up around it... specifically in Sunday school classrooms. I doubt I am the only one who has had the following experience: You arrive at Sunday school as a small child and this is the lesson that you go over with your teacher. The lesson ALWAYS goes the same way. The teacher talks about how much of a sacrifice the disciples were making; they talk about how they gave up everything to follow Jesus. The teacher then goes on to guilt-trip you by asking "If you could give up everything to follow Jesus if he showed up today." Sometimes, for added drama, they may have you list all the things you own and list your family members to really drive the point home. There is only one problem with this technique... it's all a bunch of bull.

In our current context, people aren't really beating at the doors of religious institutions in order to become pastors and priests. But in the first century, being chosen by a rabbi to be their disciple was a huge honor. A rabbi was sort of like a celebrity, they were respected wherever they went and would be followed by disciples and a whole group of excited fans. What they said would be committed to memory by their students.

In fact, every Jewish boy started out in training to become a rabbi. Rob Bell points out that the first thing they would do is memorize the first 5 books of the Old Testament, or the Torah. When this was done, they would be tested and those that were proficient would continue on to the next

stage, memorizing even more scripture. But those that “tested out” would only then go on to learn the family business or trade. The best students would continue learning until they were invited by a rabbi to become a disciple, which only happened after a lengthy period of questioning. They would be invited to follow the rabbi, to literally walk in the dust they made. They talk about the disciple learning from the rabbi by imitating them, almost walking in the footprints of the teacher.

So it was the highest honor to be invited by a rabbi to become a disciple. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. So the next time you find yourself in Sunday school and the teacher tries to give you a guilt trip, make sure you set them straight.

I mean, I get it, it's not like the disciples were destitute. Pheme Perkins writes that *“The socioeconomic picture of prosperous fishermen indicates that they were not naive youth but established members of a local society. Peter’s family home in Capernaum becomes a center from which Jesus and his followers operate. The apostle was married, had his mother-in-law living in his household and may have had children... the disciples probably had some education. The idea that they were impoverished, persons on the margins of society is unlikely.”*<sup>1</sup> So they have made sacrifices, but they weren't cut off from everything. What HAS changed is that they finally see themselves as people who can follow a rabbi. This Gospel lesson almost assumes that a sacrifice is being made. It's a given that when committing wholly to one thing, our obligations to another will be diminished. Instead, the focus of the text is for the average person to begin seeing themselves as someone who is capable of becoming a disciple.

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<sup>1</sup>Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 406.

Instead of a story about some poor fishermen with nothing to lose who feel a supernatural call to follow a stranger, we have a story about established adults who know and hear the call of a teacher, and knowing that there is more to life, decide to answer an invitation to share in a fantastic ministry.

And it's this ministry that is the focus. In verses 14 and 15 where we get the theme of the entire Gospel: *"14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"* It's this message that Jesus invites us all to take part in spreading. He doesn't just call the disciples, but speaks to each and every person, calling them saying that it's time, God has become flesh and now dwells among us. Nothing will ever be the same ever again! I'm not saying that our call to follow Jesus Christ doesn't mean there will be sacrifices, but what it really means is that God is inviting us to see so much more! There is a whole world of possibilities, but first we need to take those first steps. Are you ready? Amen.