

January 25, 2009
The Federated Church of Hyannis
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Mark 1:14-20
IMMEDIATE FAITH

There are sometimes romantic notions about what it was like being one of the original disciples – the call to action, the stirring words, the startling healings, the dramatic miracles, the impressive crowds, the shocking moments of death and resurrection. Some still have romantic notions of discipleship that if they follow Jesus their debts will disappear, their acne will clear up, and the aging process will get reversed.

There was an item circulated for a while on the Internet about life in the Navy. It was directed at people who have romantic notions of Navy life as it is sometimes depicted on TV or in the movies. Here are a few of the suggestions for people who want to actually experience Navy life, right in the comfort of their own homes:

1. Buy a dumpster, paint it gray and live in it for six months.
2. Once a week disassemble your lawn mower and inspect it.
3. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays turn your water temperature up to 200 degrees, then on Tuesdays and Thursdays turn it down to 40 degrees. On Saturdays and Sundays declare to your family that they have used too much water during the week, so all showering is prohibited.
4. Raise your bed to within 6 inches of the ceiling.
5. Have your neighbor come over each day at 5:00 a.m. and blow a whistle so loud that Helen Keller could hear it and shout “Reveille, Reveille, all hands heave out and trice up.”
6. Post a menu on the refrigerator door informing your family that you are having steak for dinner. Then make them wait in line for at least an hour; when they finally get to the kitchen, tell them that you are out of steak, but you have dried ham or hot dogs. Repeat daily until they don't pay attention to the menu any more, they just ask for hot dogs.

In the same way, we should not have any romantic notions about those who first followed Jesus. Jesus did not go to the synagogue where there was the sweet smell of incense and people reclining in prayer, but to the sea shore

where hard work was done and the smell of rotting fish can penetrate the nostrils. It was not the glamorous setting or a promise of adventure and personal satisfaction but a calling to follow Jesus wherever Jesus leads them.

Jesus explained his call in one sentence beginning with the words. “The time is fulfilled.” There are two different words in the Bible that get translated as “time.” One is chronological time as in “The time school starts is 7:45 AM.” or “The program is on at 8:30 tonight.” Mostly we live in chronological time, measured time. The other is *kairos*, significant time, the *kairotic* moment as in “When my ship comes in,” that critical moment in life.

“And the kingdom of God has come near.” The kingdom of God is simply wherever God is king. If the God and father of Jesus is your king, then you are in the kingdom of God. Luther explained the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer saying. “God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.”

“Repent, and believe in the good news.” Good news is not always very exciting or glamorous. It is almost impossible to see a good news newspaper, a newspaper or section of a newspaper that focuses fundamentally on good things. Some have tried it and discovered that few are willing to pay to read good news.

It is like the way we can drive by all of the magnificence of Nantucket Sound day after day and perhaps give it a glance, but have a good old fashioned multi-car wreck with fire trucks and police cars and a few ambulances on the side of the road and we join in with everyone else in crawling by and taking a close look at the carnage. Repent. Turn your eyes from what is destructive and violent and hateful, to what is good and hopeful and loving.

Jesus brought this message of God’s good news to four fishermen. Fishing for them is nothing like the recreational fishing some of us do to relax. This reminds me of a man who was on the river bank, relaxing, rod and reel in hand, awaiting a nibble, though the fishing season had not officially opened. A uniformed fish and game officer came and stood behind him quietly for several minutes.

When the man realized he was being watched he asked, “You the game warden?” “Yup,” came the reply. Unruffled, the man began to move the fishing pole from side to side. Finally, he lifted the line out of the water. Pointing to a minnow wriggling on the end of the line, he said, “Just teaching him how to swim.”

Maybe you have seen the bumper sticker that says, “A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work.” But for them it was work, hard work and often dangerous work. It was undoubtedly the only work they knew. It is like those on the Cape and the shores of New England who, generation after generation, follow the sometimes profitable, sometimes treacherous family business of fishing.

It appears that Simon and Andrew fished using a net. Casting a net into the sea involves a large circular net with weights fastened around the edges and a draw rope to trap fish. They would wade into the water and cast their net. It appears that James and John were wealthier. They had a boat and employees and probably exported some of the fish they caught.

What is important about them being fishermen is that there is nothing at all special about them. There is no evidence that they had any special abilities. They were not rabbis. They were not synagogue leaders. They were commercial fishermen. It is like what President Lincoln said, “God must love the common people. He made so many of them.” Maybe Jesus wanted people who had been tested by wind and waves, not people who had been sheltered in the Temple.

And Jesus said to them, “Follow me.” He did not say, “I have some good ideas,” or “there is a cause I would like you to take up,” or “here is a philosophy to consider.” He said, “Follow me.” Simply what it means to be a Christian is to follow Jesus. Before we start to consider creeds we might believe or take on some mission, we are to first turn and follow Jesus. It can take a lifetime to study and understand creeds. We can find a lifetime of worthy Christian missions to support. But it all begins and continues with the words: Follow me.

“And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” There are no details, just the facts. Immediately he called them. Immediately they followed. It reminds me of a conversation I had last year with a man who came to our home to do an energy audit. One of the things he did was to

urge us to replace all our own incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent bulbs that use much less energy. I told him I would follow his suggestion and as the old bulbs burn out replace them with florescent bulbs. He had a look of frustration come over his face. He wanted to know why I would not do it immediately.

I told him I thought it was more prudent to just wait until the old inefficient bulbs had burnt out and replace them. He was looking for a way to get me to replace them right away. He asked me, "What do you do for a living?" I said, "I'm a preacher." He asked, "Do you want people to be saved today or next month?" I said, "Today," and he made his point. Immediately when you put in the new bulbs you save energy and do something good for the environment. Why wait?

A lot of us are reserved and thoughtful. Many of us like to give things time. We want to give due consideration. That is all well and good. Jesus did say that no one builds a tower without counting the cost. Counting the cost of discipleship is not a bad thing. It makes for a more mature and complete commitment. Some of us take longer to get there than others. Sometimes we think for a long time before having children or taking a new job or moving to a new home. Shouldn't we look before we leap? It is the prudent thing to do.

But deciding to follow Jesus is different. Faith does not sit around calculating the reward. It is like a man who learned he was going to die. His pastor went to see him. The man said, "I haven't done much for the church. If I give the church one million dollars, do you think that would get me into heaven?" The preacher thought and said, "I don't know, but I think it's worth a try."

Their decision to follow Jesus was not based on calculation. In a kairotic moment of time they decided to walk away from the life they once had to a new life with Jesus. We cannot take this to mean that they – Simon and Andrew – stopped supporting their families or that James and John never again helped their father.

But it was a sudden turn away from what was familiar and comfortable, from a pattern of life kept by generations before them. Changing the family pattern is no easy thing. From generation to generation families tend to

follow the same pattern until something intervenes to change it and a new choice is made.

Their disciplining was hardly completed in a moment. The three years they followed Jesus they were basically clueless. When Jesus needed them most they ran like scared rabbits. In a story from one of the lost gospels it says that while Jesus was having his Last Supper with his disciples he looked around at them. There, in one direction, he saw Judas Iscariot, who would betray him to the authorities before three hours had passed. On the other side was Peter, who would deny him three times before the cock crowed. And almost immediately opposite him was Thomas, who, on a crucial occasion, would express doubts.

There seemed to be only one thing to do. Jesus called over the headwaiter, "Max," he said, "separate checks." There were times when the disciples disappointed Jesus, but only one turned from him and it was to the man's eternal regret.

I sometimes wonder if there weren't others whom Jesus called who said something to the effect of: "When are the meetings held? I'm in a bowling league." "I'll need to know more about your philosophy. I read a lot of philosophy in college." "What are the dues? We are thinking of buying a new camel." The ones we know of are the ones who let grace strike, who let the Holy Spirit have its way, who trusted enough to follow first and learn on the way.

There is no place in the gospel where people heard Jesus and said, "Let me think about that. I'll get back to you." They followed or they didn't follow. It is like the flight attendant who asked the passenger, "Would you like dinner." The passenger asked, "What are my choices?" The attendant responded, "Either Yes or No."

The moment of decision did not happen up on a top mountain staring at a spectacular sunset, nor did it happen in the synagogue after a stirring sermon. It happened where they worked. It was not spoken in churchy words but in words they understood like "fishing." Jesus did not ask or expect them to feel something. He just said: Follow me.

There is something about the moment of decision that we cannot see. It is the moment a diver stands motionless on the board then begins the dive on a

signal only he or she knows. It is the moment when a person decides: this will be my life companion. It is the announcement that you are about to have a child and immediately your whole world changes and there is no turning back.

It is like the story told of when the Roman legions first crossed the English Channel, and landed their small ships at the foot of the cliffs of Dover. The Britons looked down and saw them. They laughed, thinking these Romans could pose no real threat to them. But, the Roman commander ordered his soldiers to burn their boats. There would be no turning back. They were there to stay. They had left their boats for good. That is the kind of decision the disciples made.

This is the moment of grace when we hear the call and turn our life and will over to the same one who called the first disciples who dropped everything to follow him. May God grant each of us ears to hear when he is speaking and willing hearts to obey what he commands.

Thank you Lord for finding us where we are and for calling us to be your disciples. Please give us strength for the journey and joy to walk in the light you shine on this day. For it is in your name that we pray. Amen.