

Sermon for January 24, 2015
Mark 1:14-20

I'll be honest with you; there are times when this passage frustrates me. But it's not even the whole passage; it's mainly one word—immediately. You know—immediately Andrew and Simon left and followed Jesus; immediately James and John left everything and followed Jesus. I read these verses and I wonder—had they heard Jesus preach already; did they know someone who knew Jesus and told them about him that would make them go after him immediately after being asked to follow.

We don't know because Mark never tells us. He just tells us that Jesus calls and they immediately follow. Well, I have a hard time relating to that story because when I heard God calling me I did everything but follow immediately; in fact I was more like Jonah than the disciples when it came to following God's call. Oh, I answered God immediately with phrases like, "Do you think I'm crazy!?" and "You do realize who you're talking to—I'm the one who doesn't like speaking in front of people and I wanted to be a veterinarian because there are days when I like animals a whole lot better than people."

It was years before I answered God's call to follow and I tell people it was only because God worked through my then four year old nephew who told me I should go to Jesus school; when he said that I was so shocked that I forgot to duck the two by four that God used to hit me upside the head to get my attention. Even then I had more questions like, what about paying for everything? I haven't been in school for almost thirty years and now you want me to write research papers and learn a language that no one speaks any more! I'm too old to do this!

But my biggest excuse was that I thought I wasn't as faithful as those heroes of the faith that we learn about in Sunday school. And stories like this one only reinforced what I already thought; why would God be calling me to do anything. We stay thinking like that if this was the only story in Mark that we read about the disciples; in fact I think that Mark tells it because it seems to be the only thing that the disciples actually did get right!

As we read further in Mark and in the rest of the Gospels; the disciples were wrong more often than they were right. They misunderstood Jesus and everything he said and did. And when they did get a glimpse of who Jesus truly was in the next sentence they were getting it totally wrong again! I need to hear those stories as much or sometimes even more than this one because for every day that I get it right; there are two days when I get it wrong.

There is a saying that I first heard in seminary that I found to be very helpful and I think that each and every one of us that God is calling needs to remember it—God doesn't call the equipped; God equips the called. You may be thinking to yourself right now, "But Pastor Sue, God isn't calling me." God is calling each and every one of us here today and even those who aren't here. You may not be called into public ministry, but God is calling you. Some of you have been called to be doctors and nurses, some to be teachers, some to be care givers, some to be parents, some to be friends to those who seem to have no friends, some to be sales people, some to be farmers, some to be pharmacists, some to be factory workers, some to advocate for special needs children, some to be musicians.

Whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it; God calls us to be the very best at what we do and to imitate Jesus as we do it. God calls us each and everyday to treat others as Jesus did—to love, to forgive, to be patient just as God loves, forgives and is patient with us. Are we always going to get it right—no, but neither did the first disciples and Jesus kept them around! But it is only by following Jesus that we can know and experience him more deeply and to live more fully into the identity as sons and daughters that God has given us.

I leave you today with a quote by Albert Schweitzer from his book, “The Quest of the Historical Jesus.”

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: “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.