

## Sermon January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### *Jesus Invites Us to Be Disciples*

Mark doesn't give us much detail about Jesus' invitation to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, which leaves me to wonder if they really know what they are getting themselves into when they immediately drop everything to follow Jesus.

Does Jesus say more to them about what this invitation entails than Mark lets on? Has Jesus had other visits with them in the past? We know Mark likes to get right to the point in his story of Jesus.

Maybe, Simon, Andrew, James, and John are so excited to drop everything and follow Jesus, because word has gotten back to them that Jesus is the one who is to come to liberate them. Maybe they heard this from John the Baptist or one of John's followers. Maybe they are so sick of being exploited by the Roman Empire through taxation and persecution that they are more than ready for a change. So, ready in fact, that they are willing to take up their swords and follow Jesus to Rome. If it comes to that. Of course, we see later in the story that this isn't what Jesus has in mind.

Or maybe Jesus is so charismatic that people naturally draw to his message. They are inspired by his charisma, and so, without much thought, jump at the opportunity to follow Jesus.

We can go on and on with possible explanations. Mark leaves the why up to our imaginations.

What we do know through Mark's witness is that they immediately walk away from the family business and commit to what Jesus has to offer **(Image)**. Despite the challenges that lie ahead.

Now if we hear this story in context with the larger story of the gospel of Mark, we do see that throughout their experience as disciples they see firsthand how hard it is to follow Jesus. If they were naïve going in, they are not anymore. How often does Jesus tell them that they have little faith when they doubt a miracle that has just happened? How often do they fail to do what Jesus taught them to do? "Send the crowds of people living in poverty away to get their own food." "Tell this woman to be quiet." "We can't converse with Gentiles." "Our boat is going to flip over. Wake up

Jesus already. **(Image)**” “I want to be the one who sits beside you Jesus.” Throughout the gospels we see that it isn’t easy to follow Jesus.

Jonah had some idea about what would happen if he followed God, and went to Nineveh. In today’s reading we hear Jonah’s decision to finally go to Nineveh to call the people to repentance. But, reading this story within the context of the larger story of Jonah we see that before chapter 3 Jonah resists. Jonah actually goes the other way. It isn’t till God tosses Jonah overboard, and has him dwell in the belly of a big fish for three days that Jonah has a change of heart **(Image)**.

In v. 10 we see that the people who have persecuted Jonah’s people for a long time have finally come to see the error of their ways, and repent. This should have been a moment of rejoicing and reconciliation.

Instead, this ends up infuriated Jonah who wanted them to suffer for what they did to Jonah’s family and friends. Jonah knew God was merciful and would accept their repentance. This is why Jonah was avoiding the invitation to be God’s messenger in the first place. Sometimes our ways don’t align with God’s ways.

Paul’s words in Corinth give us a picture of what was expected of the early followers of Jesus. For Paul, he believed that Jesus would come again soon. In response to this urgency, he expected those who chose to become Christians to dedicate their lives first to the gospel, and then worry about the needs of their families and friends. This was a big sacrifice for many. In fact, we find through Paul’s writings that people often walked away, because the sacrifices were too much.

In a world where we have access to so many opportunities, we find it much harder today to commit to one thing. Often times our commitments are stretched across so many fields. Whether it is helping with your child’s sports team or volunteering for your favorite charity **(Image)**. Whether it is needing to take on an extra project at work or needing to drive the children around to all their extra circular activities. Whether you are needing to watch the grandchildren. Or mastering the great balancing act it takes to get to all your grandchildren’s activities (Image). Sometimes you may have to be in two places at once. Whether you are sitting on the Condo board or on some other board or agency, because you are now retired, and have all the time in the world to volunteer. I wouldn’t be surprised if after counting all

the times we have been asked to commit to something in our lifetime, that we are somewhere in the thousands.

Yet, even with all these opportunities for the taking, Jesus invites us to commit to follow him. To become a disciple (**Image: someone getting baptized**). A Christian. Someone who is to dedicate their entire life to proclaiming the gospel through word and deed.

Accepting this invitation, we can all resonate with the challenges and sacrifices we have to make to stay committed to our faith. Whether it is spending less time with loved ones, because of a volunteer commitment to a particular ministry. Or dealing with a breakdown of a relationship, because our loved one can't understand why we waste so much of our time believing in this Christianity stuff. Or we change as we learn and grow in our faith. Growing apart from those in our lives who don't share the same beliefs and values we do. Whether it is having to miss out on curling this winter, because we committed to a bible study instead (**Image**). Or we can't join our friends Saturday night for a beer, because we need to get up extra early for church this Sunday due to being worship assistant or singing in the band. Whether we stand apart from our friends, because we are speaking out against an injustice we see. Or we face persecution for standing with someone who is being marginalized by the majority. Whether it is challenging ourselves to think differently after seeing how our beliefs led to words and actions that hurt people. Or struggling to accept the mercy that God offers us when we fall short of our call to discipleship.

To immediately get up and follow Jesus isn't easy when we see from the Old Testament, our gospels, the early Christian writings, and from our own life experience how hard it is to take this invitation seriously. To live our lives imitating Christ everyday. To do what God invites us to do. Proclaiming God's gracious love through word and deed to those we encounter.

This is why Jesus invites us not only to follow him, but to walk with him. To open up our scriptures. To listen to the stories of God's gracious love for us. To envision ourselves standing right there with Jesus. Side by side. Learning and growing right along with the disciples. Receiving the Spirit that gives us what we need to imitate Jesus in our daily lives. Whether it is developing the time management skills to commit to a ministry without

alienating those we love. Or the drive to invest time and energy in a ministry above other things that may be important to us. Whether it is the healing we need to recover from a broken relationship or the strength we need to face the persecution that comes our way for standing up for someone who is marginalized. Whether it is in the grace we need to get up and try again. Or the wisdom we need to challenge our own beliefs and values when we see that they are hurting our neighbor **(Image)**.

Jesus' invitation isn't for us to go at it alone. It is to walk with Jesus, to walk with the Spirit, to walk with all the other people in the body of Christ. To be shaped and moved by God's gracious love. So, that we can live out this love in everything we do. From volunteering for our favorite charity. To parenting our children. To caring and supporting our grandchildren. To being a good spouse or partner. To being an attentive friend. To welcoming the stranger. To walking with the marginalized. To speaking out against injustice.

Yes, there will be sacrifices, but as we see from Jonah's story. As we see from the disciple's stories. As we see from our own stories. What we will witness from being Christ's hands and feet in our world far outweighs the sacrifices we need to make. The repentance of a whole community. The healing and renewing of many. The peaceful downfall of Empires like Apartheid **(Image)**. The kingdom come that welcomes people.

Transforming people in ways we never thought possible. Yes, there will be sacrifices, but what Christ Jesus will do through us, far outweighs the sacrifices we will have to make.

Let us pray, gracious God, give us what we need to invest our time and energy into your ministry. When we feel overwhelmed by the sacrifices we need to make, give us support. When we fall short of living out your invitation, show us grace. **Amen.**

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