

## **SERMON for 07.11.21 Mark 1: 14-20 'Follow me' – Revd Carol Harley**

Both of our readings this morning are about following the call of God: in the Old Testament Jonah obeyed God; in the Gospel the four fishermen obeyed the call of Jesus to follow him.

Let's consider the Gospel call by Jesus to the four fishermen.

'FOLLOW ME' says Jesus to James and John, Simon and Andrew - the four fishermen.

The Scottish hymn-writer from the Iona Community, John Bell, wrote the beautiful hymn, '*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?*', which we will shortly be singing as the Gradual hymn.

The words of the hymn continue:

*'Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?*

*Will you let my love be shown?*

*Will you let my name be known,*

*will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?*

When we sing this great hymn it always speaks to me of this passage – the call of Jesus to the first disciples: '*Follow me and I will make you fish for people*'. Simon, Andrew, James and John are described by the writer of the Gospel as '*immediately*' leaving their nets to follow Jesus.

So the question we need to start with this morning is this:

Are we ready to follow Jesus *immediately*? Are we willing to let go of much in our lives that puts barriers between us and God and let it all go so that we can be the disciples we are called to be?

Can we?

The four disciples were all fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. As the writer of the Gospel of Mark makes the point, they were 'casting their nets'. Mark's is the shortest Gospel and considered to be the earliest one written out of the four Gospels. As we read it we can sense the urgency of the work of Jesus and his disciples. For example, the word "immediately" is a favourite word used repetitively throughout and seems to show the nonstop, never-ending movement that Jesus had in his ministry. The urgency of Jesus's message and ministry, and that urgency of purpose and discipleship is made clear to those who read it. The disciples didn't think about the call given to them.

They followed Jesus, *immediately*.

They responded to God's call, *immediately*.

They obeyed the beckoning of the Spirit, *immediately*.

Also in verse 16, Mark says, what the disciples left behind was their nets. *They were casting their nets out into the sea.* Now, when I read this passage, I often gloss over the nets, but fishing nets are not just anything in the time of Jesus. Nets were carefully constructed and took a lot of work to keep them repaired and cleaned. Fishermen didn't only know how to catch fish but how to make nets and they had to make specific nets for use during the day and others to use at night.

The fishing industry on the Sea of Galilee was a big industry in the time of Jesus and so fishermen, like the family that Jesus came from, were not among the poorest families in their communities. They weren't rich or well off. They were the 'trade class' families that relied on skilled labour and hired workers, as is also described in verse 20 of this passage.

Mark tells us that James and John left their father behind with their nets, a real act of devotion to Jesus, but families depended on their sons passing on their expertise and skills to the next generation - the skills learnt from their father. With the two brothers leaving their father, Zebedee, behind to work alone, he now had to do the work of three people and not one, so now there would no-one to pass their skills on to. In Jesus's day family relationships and obligations were strong, the glue that held communities together. They, it would seem, had walked away from these expectations, love, and deep relationships.

Letting go of nets and family, things that literally knit you together in all sorts of ways, are considerable acts of devotion. Simon, Andrew, James and John walked away from a lot. Not to mention they didn't know what they were getting themselves into. They were heading into an entirely new line of work. They were walking into an entirely new future, with no promise of steady pay, and no way to bring their families along.

These details, that seem little when we first read this passage, are not little at all! Mark puts them in here to talk about what following Jesus really means. How steep the climb to real discipleship actually is and how real the costs are. Mark is telling us in all sorts of ways that Jesus is not inviting the first disciples into a new career, '*Follow me and I will make you fish for people*' but a new way of living.

Mark is reminding us of something that must be at the core of who we are, that discipleship as a process of identity with Jesus Christ is not a task to be fulfilled, a box to be ticked, a strategic plan to put in place, a budget to be balanced, or a building to be made perfect. But instead, for a life to be moulded and conformed to the way of Jesus which is the way of justice, of peace, of nonviolence, of equality, and of overturning the existing order of power and privilege.

Following the way of Jesus is a leaving of the nets, which symbolise safety and security, which order our lives and have great power over us, then be knit together in a new net with a new community, and then, importantly, to be knit back together by and with the Spirit.

Walking *away from* so many things to follow Jesus.

Walking *into many* things to gain New Life.

What do we need to walk away from?

What is precious that might need to be let go of?

Most importantly, what needs to be picked up?

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*Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?*

*Will you let my love be shown?*

*Will you let my name be known?*

*Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?*