**Mark’s Gospel: *Jesus and the Kingdom of God***

**Sunday September 15, 2019**

**Mark #2: *Following Jesus* (Mark 1:16-28)**

**1. Introduction: *The Recruitment of the Disciples***

Imagine for a moment that Jesus followed the standard practices of modern employers and used a consulting firm to help him choose the people who would be a part of his organization. He might have received an email like this:

To: Jesus, Son of Joseph, Woodcrafter's Carpenter Shop, Nazareth

From: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

The profiles of all tests are included, and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service, we make some general comments for your guidance, much as an auditor will include some general statements. This is given as a result of staff consultation and comes without any additional fee.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely,

Jordan Management Consultants

([**https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/1678/resumes-of-apostles/**](https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/1678/resumes-of-apostles/)**)**

 This make-believe email nicely illustrates that when Jesus chose his first disciples, he called the unlikeliest of people to join him in his mission. And yet, these people would form the nucleus of the early church, give leadership at its most vulnerable times, and sacrifice their very lives for their Lord. Jesus still works in this way, calling the unlikeliest of people to follow him and to serve him in the world. I’m thankful that Jesus didn’t look at my resume when he called me to follow him!

**2. Jesus’ Call of Discipleship: *Come, Follow Me***

 Mark’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ dramatic announcement of the nearness of God’s kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). This is a key moment in the Gospel story, which clearly communicates to us, the readers, that Jesus’ arrival on the scene was a significant event in God’s plan of redemption. So, after this initial proclamation, Jesus starts his work of establishing God’s rule in the world. I find it interesting, however, that he didn’t go about this mission single-handedly, but he invited others to join him in this important work. The story of the calling of the four fishermen reveals many important things about discipleship, but one of the key lessons is that Jesus invites us to participate in what he’s doing in the world. Mark’s Gospel teaches us that Jesus didn’t simply go out and get the job done, but he first went out and found people whom he could train and develop into fellow workers for the kingdom. Jesus operates the same way today. He calls each one of us to follow him, to learn from him, and to join him in his kingdom work.

 I also find it interesting that Jesus met these four fishermen where they were at, by the sea on their fishing boats (Mark 1:16, 19). Jesus didn’t hang out in the synagogue, waiting for potential disciples to come to him. He took the initiative and went out to the place where these guys spent most of their time. Jesus didn’t lease a property or built a ministry centre, he travelled the dusty roads of Galilee, stopping to minister in the villages on the way. While I realize that the world of Jesus is different than ours in many ways, his method of doing mission is quite adaptable to our context. It has become very evident that most people don’t typically come to church on a Sunday morning anymore. Whether they’re hostile or indifferent to Christianity, many people don’t see the need for Jesus in their lives. Now we can mourn this cultural shift and long for the good old days or we can imitate Jesus’ way of doing mission and connect with people wherever we are, which will be outside of these doors in all likelihood. We need to see that the setting of our ministry is not just behind these four walls but also in the community beyond our doors.

 So, Jesus went out and walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, a large inland sea, twelve miles long and six miles across at its widest point. On the western and northern shores of the lake, there were many towns and fishing villages. In one of those fishing villages, Jesus he met four fishermen who would become his first disciples. These fishermen were hard at work, casting their nets into the sea (Mark 1:16) or mending their nets in preparation for fishing (Mark 1:19). Jesus *calls* them, saying, “*Come, follow me”* (Mark 1:17, 20). His words express the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It entails *following* his lead down the road of life. He calls people to give their personal allegiance to him, to learn from him, to obey him and to identify themselves with his mission. As his disciples, we strive to follow his ways, to observe his actions, to imitate his way of life, and in so doing; we seek to be more Christ-like in our world.

**3. Following and Forsaking: *They left the nets . . . they left their father***

Yet there can be no following without forsaking. To follow Christ is to renounce all lesser loyalties. When Jesus said, “*Come, follow me,”* to Simon Peter and Andrew, they *immediately* left their nets and followed him (Mark 1:18). They didn’t even take the time to draw in that last catch of fish. When Jesus called out to James and John, they *immediately* left their father and the hired workers in the boat and went after him (Mark 1:20). In this passage we see a literal abandonment of work and family on the part of these four fishermen. So, what are the implications of the call of Jesus for us?

 In response to this important question, John Stott offered this helpful comment: “Today, in principle, the call of the Lord Jesus has not changed. He still says, ‘Follow me,’ and adds, ‘whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.’ In practice, however, this does not mean for the majority of Christians a physical departure from their home or their job. It implies rather an inner surrender of both, and a refusal to allow either family or ambition to occupy the first place in our lives” (Stott, *Basic Christianity,* p. 109). Our response to the call of Jesus involves a radical obedience to him on our part. In a nutshell, it means making him Lord of our lives. Making Jesus Lord of our lives necessitates bringing every aspect of our lives under his control and renouncing everything in our lives that challenges his Lordship.

 I decided to follow Jesus when I was seventeen years old. Right away I began to worship in a local church, attended my friend’s youth group and became involved in my high school’s Christian fellowship group. As I grew in my faith, I sensed a call to Christian ministry. I prayerfully considered this call, sought the advice of my pastor, and talked to my Christian friends about it. They encouraged me to pursue this calling. When I told my family about it, they were not thrilled. It wasn’t that my family was against Christianity. My mother was very supportive of my faith, yet she disagreed with this career choice. Like any concerned parent, she wanted me to make the right career choice and do well financially. She felt that ministers didn’t make that much money and she feared that I would end up living a life of near poverty. But even though my family was not enthusiastic about my decision to enter Christian ministry, I knew that it was the right path for my life. To stay the course and follow God’s leading was not easy for me because the dynamics in my family made it difficult to go against the grain. I dearly loved my mom and dad, but I had to be obedient to the Lord. Eventually, my parents came around and respected my decision.

Jesus doesn’t call all of us to be pastors, but he does call all of us to follow him. As we reflect on this passage, we are faced with several questions:

 • Have I responded to Jesus’ call to follow him?

 • Have I forsaken everything in order to follow him?

 • Are there aspects in my life that I have not completely surrendered to him?

 • Have I renounced sin and the self in order to follow Christ?

A little later in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus will give this challenge to his audience, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”* (Mark 8:34). May each one of us prayerfully consider where we are at in our discipleship journey.

**4. Transformation of Vocation: *I will make you to be fishers of people***

 While Jesus calls us as individuals, he calls us to be part of a group. When he walked the earth, he didn’t have just one person serving alongside him; he gathered a company of people to himself. So discipleship has individual and communal aspects. The spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation on Scripture are often practiced independently. But we need to be connected with other Christians in order to foster our development as disciples. As we pray, study Scripture, worship, break bread and serve with other Christians, we learn to be more like Jesus. Being in community with others refines those rough edges and forces us to have the mind of Jesus. Christian community is no place for self-centred attitudes or actions. It is within Christian community that we learn to be focused on the needs of others instead of our own.

 When Jesus calls us to follow him, he makes us a part of his mission in the world. He gives us a new purpose. The process of discipleship, then, is a *transformation of vocation*. Jesus said to those fishermen, “Come, follow me and *I will make you fish for people”* (Mark 1:17). When we respond to Jesus’ call to follow him, he begins a work of transformation in our lives. He made a new kind of fishermen out of Simon, Andrew, James and John. But the transformation was not immediate; they didn’t become fishers of people right away. It involved a process of observing Jesus’ ministry, being taught by him, being empowered by him, and being sent out by him.

 God calls every Christian to ministry, that is, to be a servant of other people for the sake of Christ. No Christian can live for him or herself any longer. What form this service will take is up to God’s will at work in individual lives. But whatever forms that service takes; it will be connected to the larger mission of God in the world. So, the image of fishing for people is an apt one. The image of fishing for people can stir up a negative picture of baiting people and drawing them in hook, line and sinker or of ensnaring people in a net. But it’s a positive image of God *gathering* all people to himself. Ephesians 1:9-10 nicely expresses the mission of God for the cosmos:

 “He (God) has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,as a plan for the fullness of time, *to gather up all things in him*, things in heaven and things on earth.”

 God’s ultimate goal is to gather up all things into Christ. We are called to participate in that mission as we strive to reconcile people to God. Our community of faith is a foretaste of this great in gathering as we are joined together in Christ. Jesus doesn’t call all of us to be ordained ministers, but he does call all of us to participate in the mission of God. As we reflect on this passage, we are faced with several questions:

 • Am I involved in Jesus’ mission?

 • Am I open to his transforming work in my life?

 • Are we, as a church, open to being a part of the mission of God?

May we as individuals and as a congregation, hear and respond to Jesus’ call to follow him.