



1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20
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The Gospel of Mark commonly features the theme of urgency. It is a fast-moving narrative. In this passage, we see Jesus quickly calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John while they are fishing. *Immediately* they leave what they are doing to follow Jesus. This is a *positive* reaction: it's positive (they said "Yes" to Jesus' call) but it was still a *reaction*.

A *positive response* is what a pastor who is constantly looking for volunteers wants to hear. But knowing when to say "Yes" is just as important as knowing when to say "No." (Matthew 5:33-37)

Some people have a hard time saying "No." Some others, are quick "No" sayers. Sometimes it's hard to hear a "No." Sometimes, the "Yes" comes too quickly, and people stay engaged out of guilt until they drop out of the commitment exhausted.

Even Paul in his letter to the Corinthians counseled Christians to consider the urgency of the time.

The disciples in today's gospel don't pause to think about what Jesus is asking them to do. They don't go through a *discernment* period with their elders, friends, family, and church. They don't say, "Wait, Jesus, let me think and pray about it." They hear Jesus' call and *immediately* follow him.

Mark's gospel is so short of details and so quick to move to the next segment that we get no sense if the disciples hesitated, looked back, explained to their families what was going on, requested more time or more information from Jesus. According to Mark, a disciple's response is immediate and does not leave room for planning. Mark seems to say: "When Jesus calls, don't think twice about it."

How many times have we felt or even known what God wanted us to do, but resisted? What might God be calling us to right now that we think is impossible? What might God want to do through us?

In Mark's gospel, everything moves quickly. There is great urgency and Mark gives few details; he invests little time in words.

In fact, in a few verses, Jesus comes to be baptized by John in the Jordan; a voice from heaven proclaims him God's Son, "the Beloved;" is transported by the Spirit into the wilderness where he stays for forty days and nights; John is arrested; and Jesus begins his public ministry.

Careful reading shows us that the only words Jesus actually preaches in the first chapters of Mark's Gospel are, "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news."

We might say that those 20 words referring to fulfillment, the reign of God, repentance and belief in good news are the core message of the entire Gospel. Everything else that Jesus said and did demonstrated the meaning of that message, emphasizing "repent and believe," two words which might ultimately signify the same thing. Jesus' call to repentance, *metanoia*, invited people to take on a new mindset.

I am always fascinated by this part of the calling of the disciples. Fishing is not a hobby for them. It is their livelihood, the way they make money and support their families. He interrupts their work and life is not the same anymore. As soon as Jesus calls them, they drop their nets just like that. John and James even leave their father still working at the nets.

How do they know they can trust Jesus? How do they know that he will not disappoint them? Perhaps, they are shocked that *he* has placed his trust in them. Do they really feel worthy of that trust? The disciples are probably honored to be considered for discipleship and be called to follow him.

There is something so compelling about what Jesus proclaims and something so powerful about this invitation, that they have no choice but to follow. They hear his voice, and they accept the invitation to throw

their lot in with him and join his cause. The call is so intense and meaningful that they are willing to go counter the social norm.¹

From that day on, they entered a process of learning, of discipleship, in the course of which they found themselves transformed and giving their lives in imitation of Jesus. The more this happened, the more the announcement of the reign of God became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

And this has been going on through the centuries down to our time. An unbroken chain of witnesses trusted enough to commit themselves to the holy journey and the fulfilment of the time of the kingdom. And through them, Jesus tapped our shoulders: he calls us still to drop everything and change our mindset to follow him. What must we let go of to follow him?

The choice to leave “fathers” behind stands to mean any societal structure that is an impediment to the coming of the kingdom. Which is ours? Can gender violence, hatred, white supremacy, male chauvinism, authoritarianism, Christian nationalism, and greed be all manifestations of the patriarchal system still at work in our social psyche?

Would the kingdom of God mean a restoration of justice among nations and in our relationships, ecological justice, respect for nature?

I pray that we all might be able to know and to trust in the love of Jesus as much as these first disciples, amen.

¹ Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16; Prov 23:22-25; Tob 5:1; Sir 3:1-16. This is in preparation to Mark 10:29-30.