**January 25, 2015 – 3rd Sunday after Epiphany**

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*Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

One thing about the Gospel of Mark that you can count on – things move really fast. We’re still only in the first chapter and already we’ve met John the Baptist, Jesus has been baptized and recognized by God as his Son, Jesus has been tempted in the wilderness, John the Baptist has been arrested, and Jesus has headed north to Galilee.

“The time is fulfilled,” says Jesus. Wait a second. You just GOT here. Let us catch our breath for a second and think about this!

Before I go on, I want to talk a little about time. There are two words for time in Greek (that I know of). One is *chronos* and the other is *kairos*. Now you might have heard that chronos is human time and kairos is God’s time, but that isn’t exactly right. Someone smarty-pants said that knowingly once in my New Testament class – luckily it wasn’t me, but it could have been – and all but got his knuckles rapped by the professor’s ruler. Professor Good didn’t have a lot of time for things that people make up in order to try to make sense of the Gospels. Her favorite phrase, said in her lovely British accent, was, “But what does the TEXT say?”

But in point of fact, although here and there in the New Testament, chronos and kairos are used interchangeably, they do have slightly different meanings. Chronos, from which we get chronological and chronic, tends to mean a specific amount or point in linear time. For instance, if you ask, “what time is it,” and the answer you expect would involve someone looking at a watch, chances are you would be using chronos. However if the answer you’re expecting is, “It’s Howdy Doody Time!” chances are you are using kairos.

Kairos does mean time, but in the sense of a fitting season, opportunity, or an occasion, like that song by the Zombies, *The Time of the Season*. So when Jesus uses kairos here, he’s saying “This is it – the time is right for God’s will to be fulfilled on earth.” And he doesn’t waste any time – kairos OR chronos – in getting started.

He called Simon and Andrew and immediately they left their nets and followed him. Then he immediately called James and John, and they left their father, Zebedee and followed him. There’s a lot of immediacy in this passage. As a matter of fact, the word *eutheos*, or immediately, appears, in some form, 40 times in Mark’s Gospel alone. That’s almost half of the 87 occurrences of that word in the entire New Testament.

Neither Jesus nor his followers mess around. They don’t make plans, they don’t consider, they just act. That can be a really scary prospect, to most of us. And not only does Jesus say, “follow,” and they do, but he also tells Simon and Andrew that he is going to change what they are. They come to him as fishermen, but he says they will become fishers of men.

Once again, the NRSV, in its effort to be inclusive, leads us a little astray. They translate “I am going to make you fishers of men” as “I will make you fish for people, presumably to get rid of that pesky word *anthropos*, or men.” The NRSV translation says that Jesus is going to change what they DO. The other, and clearly correct, translation says he’s going to change what they ARE. Big difference.

Well, how do we feel about being changed into something else? I think it’s pretty scary, myself. Just before I was ordained to the diaconate, I remember talking about not knowing what I was going to be afterwards. In seminary, we tossed around the term, “ontological change” like we knew what it meant. “I’m going back to my home parish to be ontologically changed, ha ha!”

Without going into too much detail, ontology just means being, so ontological change means change in being. There – now Parmenides, Plato, and Thomas Aquinas are all spinning in their graves!

Anyway, my diaconal ordination comes along and I didn’t feel anything but happy, and a little relieved. But a year later, at my ordination to the priesthood, I felt a huge change that I wasn’t expecting, given my experience just a year before. I couldn’t say what, but I could tell that something pretty major had happened.

But that just happens at ordinations, right? Only for certain people, right?

Wrong. Jesus called ordinary people out of their ordinary lives, and changed them into something new. Something new and powerful in God’s service. He didn’t go to the Temple and find a priest, or the synagogue and find a rabbi. He went to the seashore and grabbed ordinary working people.

People like us. You, me, all of us. Jesus is calling us and telling us he will change us. But that call requires a response. He didn’t sneak up on Simon and say, “Zap – you’re no longer an ordinary fisherman!” He called and IMMEDIATELY they followed him, of their own volition.

So what’s stopping us? Why aren’t we following?

Well, one thing might be fear. Lately, Michael has been reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, and one of his quotations that continues to stand out for me is, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." As Michael puts it, Bonhoeffer's not for sissies.

Neither is Jesus. Becoming a faithful Christian disciple takes both just a moment and a whole lifetime. A moment to say, “Yes!” and a lifetime to figure out what that means. What is Jesus calling us to become? How will we have to change? Do we WANT to change? What will we lose? All of these are scary questions.

But they are essential questions to answer, in order to be disciples of God’s Son. All of us have probably said yes to Jesus on one level, at one time, or we wouldn’t be here. But saying yes isn’t enough – we have to follow. Follow, and obey, and be willing to let God change us into what he needs us to be.

These questions need to be answered on an individual basis, but also as a congregation. Who are we as a community? What are we willing to do to follow Jesus? How are we willing to let ourselves be transformed by God for his use in the world?

Our annual meeting is coming up next week. Annual meetings are a good time to sum up and celebrate the previous year, but they can also be a time to start to figure out what God wants us to do as his disciples. Annual meetings, along with the tons of food, the hopefully-not-boring reports, and the King Cake, are a time to listen for Jesus’ call to us to follow him.

Follow him and be changed. Follow him and be his disciples. Let’s all listen carefully, and when the call comes, drop our nets and immediately follow Jesus, wherever he might lead us.

Let us pray.

*God of love, source of mercy and compassion, weave your dream for the world into the fabric of our lives.*

*Remove the scales from our eyes and lift the indifference from our hearts, so that we may see your vision – a new reign of justice and compassion that will renew the earth.*

*Transform our lives, so that we may accomplish your purpose. Anoint us with your Spirit that we might bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim release to the captive.*

*Give us a new urgency and a new commitment to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and visit those who live in isolation.*

*Help us to reach out to those whom no one else will touch, to accept the unacceptable, and to embrace the enemy.*

*Surround us with your love, fill us with your grace, and strengthen us for your service.*

*Empower us to respond to the call of Jesus – to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, and to follow.*

*Make us your disciples.*

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Amen