

Getting the Call

As we have noted at other times, Mark packs a lot of information into his short Gospel account. In today's Gospel reading, Mark gives us the call narratives of first apostles of Jesus. In the 1st Century, it was up to the students to find the teacher and ask to follow them. Jesus does the total opposite. He called the apostles in a way that was similar to when God called the prophets. He went to them where they were and called them.

Another detail which Mark implicitly gives us is that he lets us know where Andrew, Peter, James & John fit in society. They were working class people, not the richest, but not the poorest either. We could call them 'middle class.' They were actively working - Andrew & Peter were casting nets; James & John were mending them. The fact that Zebedee had hired hands also indicates a social status of being fairly well-off.

It seems odd that Andrew, Peter, James and John would just drop everything at the simple words of Jesus and go follow Him. Perhaps that is why John, in his Gospel account established that Andrew and Peter knew about Jesus when they were at the Jordan. Before last week's Gospel reading, John tells us that after Jesus' baptism, Andrew and another person, who were followers of John the Baptist, asked John about this person whom John was talking about. John the Baptist told them to go and ask Jesus and Jesus invited them to come and see where He was living. Also, given the fact that the apostle John never refers to himself in his Gospel account, we could deduce that he was the other person with Andrew. Having this connection between Andrew and John with Jesus established at the Jordan River, we could see where they were interested in following Jesus. Perhaps Jesus told them that it wasn't the right time to

follow Him and that He would find them. This is now where we pick-up Mark's version of the call of these first apostles of Jesus.

Andrew, Peter, James and John had no idea what lay ahead of them on the journey they were about to embark. Perhaps at least, they hoped for an easier life, a life where they did not have to look over their shoulders and see Roman soldiers watching them, a life where Israel would be a free, independent nation again. Whatever their reasons, whatever pre-arrangements they may or may not have had with Jesus, the fact remains that when Jesus did call them, they responded and were willing to follow Jesus, not knowing exactly where this journey would take them.

The question then comes before us, if we were in their situation, would we be so willing to follow Jesus from Him saying such a cryptic call - "I will make you fishers of men"? Does it even matter if or how we respond to a call from Jesus? We see in the Biblical record that God does get what God wants - sooner or later, God's will is done. So, does it matter if we respond & do God's will or just bank on the forgiveness & grace we received as baptized Christians and let someone else do it?

The short answer is that sometimes there is no one else who can do it. The short story "A Simple Gesture," is an inspirational tale penned by John W. Schlatter and published in the 1993 bestseller *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and tells the story of a boy named Bill who was carrying all his schoolbooks home one Friday. After tripping and dropping all his books, another boy, Mark, saw him and offered to help. Mark invited Bill to his home for a drink and they hung out together that day. They had become friendly to each other and would acknowledge each other when they saw each other. Eventually, one day, Bill told

Mark, privately, that he had been planning on killing himself, but Mark's act of kindness gave him reason to change his mind.

You may have heard a more elaborate telling of this tale, but the point is that sometimes, you might be the only person who can show someone else a spark of hope. It might be something as simple as acknowledging the presence of someone else through a smile or a nod of the head or opening a door for them. Sometimes, it may be something that you did for someone else that no one else knows about or you do not even realize you did something yet made a big difference to that person.

These kinds of stories reinforce the popular saying: "To the world you might be one person; but to one person, you might be the world." It may sound rather cliché-ish or grandiose, but doing a small act of kindness for someone might just change their perspective on life. That could be why God calls each and every one of us, to make that difference in someone's life that nobody else can.

This being the season of Epiphany, a season where we see God revealing the identity of Jesus to the world, we might wonder how this Gospel reading fits in with this idea of revealing. We see this revealing in the first verses of the reading where Mark tells us what Jesus first 'preached.' It is not so much as a revealing of Jesus' identity but more of a revealing of God's plan. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God has come near, that the time has been fulfilled. We notice a couple of things that are worth mentioning. First, the Kingdom of God, which is not a kingdom that is geographic in nature that is marked by boundaries, is coming and there is nothing that we can do to stop it. Secondly, we see from the Greek that the 'time' that Jesus used was '*kairos*' time, not '*chronos*' time. *Kairos* time indicates that it is God's time, the right time, the proper time, for

something to happen. Again, this is something that we cannot stop from happening. It shows us that God really is in control and things will happen when God deems that they should happen.

When we take this together with the first reading from Jonah; which tells us of the repenting of the Ninevites; we see, again, that God's grace and forgiveness are for the whole world and not just a chosen few. This is not to say that it does not matter what we do, that we will be forgiven anyways by God, but as the Ninevites did, we must turn to God and repent of our misdeeds. We should be living our lives the way that God wants, the way in which God intended. When we do not, God has provided the means in which we can receive forgiveness because of God's love for us.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/go074H9QZGY>

Service: <https://youtu.be/2w4Hg6GeAtg>