

## “Follow me” – a road trip with Jesus (Mark 1: 16-20)

### *Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

(Translation © Lawrence Moore, *Mark for Missional Disciples*, Walking the Walk Publications, 2018)

### Commentary

#### *“Follow me”:*

These are the first words that Mark’s Jesus speaks to a specific audience. Christian faith, according to all the gospel writers, is best expressed in terms of following Jesus – in answering his call to become disciples. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus; to be the church is to be a community of disciples of Jesus.

It’s an invitation to join Jesus on the journey he is making. Jesus has a purpose – a mission. He calls it, “the Kingdom of God”. He has places to go and people to see. This isn’t about starting a new religion: it’s about changing the world. Jesus has just announced that God is transforming the world into all that God intended it to be from creation: the Kingdom of God, not the Roman Empire; a place of life and flourishing, not death and despair (Mark 1:15). As people are about to find out, Jesus makes a real difference. He doesn’t just *announce* Good News, but *does* Good News and *is* Good News! His call to follow is to be part of that story.

Note that Jesus says “Follow me”, rather than, “Sit down, get out your notebooks and pens, and take careful notes”. What Jesus wants them to learn can’t be taught in a classroom or church building. It has to be experienced. He doesn’t just want them to learn things; he needs them to *unlearn* a whole way of thinking, living and acting, and discover a new way – the new world of the Kingdom of God. This is about transformation, rather than education. He’s not inviting them to a seminar, but asking them to join him on a road trip.

#### *Disciples:*

“Disciple” comes from the Latin *disco*, meaning, “learn”. It’s a much more powerful word than “pupil”, where the stress is on “acquiring knowledge”. A disciple is shaped by the master: the aim is to share the master’s life; become like the master; live like the master; share in the master’s mission and fate. Sharing in the master’s fate will be come the crunch point when the disciples realise that Jesus is taking them on a journey along the Way to the Cross.

For now, though, their response is immediate: they leave their livelihoods as fisherman, their homes and their families, and follow Jesus (vs 20). This is their equivalent of baptism – of “repentance”: leaving the path their lives have followed up to now, and starting a new life with Jesus and his message of the Kingdom. They had been disciples of their fathers, who taught them how to provide for themselves by catching fish; now they were beginning the journey of discipleship of Jesus, who would teach them how to “fish” for the sake of others (vs 17).

*A new community:*

Jesus is calling each of them to follow him. Yet the call is not simply to each of them individually.

Together, the band of disciples will form a new messianic community. The way that they live and act together ought to be a picture of the new society – of what the world is meant to look like under God’s rule. They are to be a picture of faithful Israel – how the People of God ought to live and be. And of course, as the community of disciples of Jesus, they are the forerunners of the Christian church.

This is important. Mark doesn’t write his gospel to give people information about Jesus. He is writing for the church – the community of disciples that came into being after Jesus’ death and resurrection. He tells us the story of Jesus and his disciples because he believes that the church is the living descendant of the community of disciples. Our task is no different from the disciples: it is to follow Jesus and share in his mission of transforming the world into the Kingdom of God.

This means that we need to pay very close attention to the story of Jesus’ first disciples. We are to see reflected in the pages of Mark’s gospel our own calling and struggles to follow Jesus faithfully. When the disciples appear laughably blind to Jesus, or deaf to his words, we are challenged to see our own extraordinary blindness and deafness.

When they get it badly wrong, we are to recognise our own capacity for disaster: after all, the church has somehow managed to believe that it is okay to follow Jesus and be responsible for the Inquisition, slavery, the oppression of women, the Holocaust, Apartheid, and the persecution of gay people. It is possible to claim to be a community of Jesus-followers and still be very Bad News indeed!

*Becoming part of the Good News:*

The measure of how faithfully disciples follow Jesus is to what extent people experience them as Good News, in the same way that Jesus is Good News. The root cause of the contemporary decline of the church isn’t that people are disenchanted with Jesus. Jesus retains all his street cred. Rather, people recognise the gulf between Jesus and the community and individuals that claim to follow him. The problem for the church today isn’t Jesus – it’s the church!

Jesus, we will discover, is calling his disciples to form a community in which greatness/faithfulness is measured in terms of servant hood and self-sacrifice. It is a

community that exists for the sake of others, rather than its own sake. The disciples are preoccupied with their own survival and success. That is why they find Jesus' call to follow the Way of the Cross too difficult (Mark 8:31ff). Their story ends in Gethsemane: "All of them deserted him and fled" (Mark 14:50).

The church gets it most wrong when it prioritises its own survival and success. The road trip Jesus is calling his disciples to is a journey to a way of living and acting in the world that will remind people of Jesus, because they, like him, will be experienced as Good News. He calls us to our own journey of discipleship and mission: to become Jesus-shaped churches, full of Jesus-shaped people, making a Jesus-shaped difference.

For reflection:

1. How much of your own experience and preaching has been about making "pupils" rather than disciples? Is this reflected in the expectations of your congregation?
2. What would be the best way to encourage individuals and your church community to set out on a "road trip with Jesus"? How would you get them excited about growing in their own faith and making a Jesus-shaped difference in their communities?
3. To what extent is your church already Good News in the community? In what ways might it be regarded as irrelevant or positively Bad News?
4. What do you hear Jesus calling or challenging you to do? What do you hear Jesus calling or challenging your church to do?

## Resources

Images/multimedia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAeyW-BV5cY>

[http://www.textweek.com/art/calling\\_disciples.htm](http://www.textweek.com/art/calling_disciples.htm)

<http://seedstuff.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/epiphany-4b-january-25-following.html>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH\\_8lvVgiGI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH_8lvVgiGI)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg2b4kKDM8k&feature=related>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ji35keq2EDo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YztvjePz0uk&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilqJYqBrbI4>

## Children

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/year-b-3rd-sunday-after-epiphany-3rd.html>

<https://dskidsermons.com/2014/12/10/january-25th-2015-3rd-sunday-after-epiphany/>

<https://sacredstory.org/2012/01/17/simon-and-andrew-james-and-john-fishing-for-people/>

## Hymns & prayers

<https://lifeinliturgy.wordpress.com/2015/01/14/epiphany-3b/>

<http://rev-o-lution.org/2015/01/16/worship-resources-for-january-25th-2015-third-sunday-after-epiphany/>

<http://www.lca.org.au/worship/cowadmin/?p=6724>

<http://www.beswick.info/rcresources/03B97OS.htm>

**God, our maker, you have fed us for the journey  
with worship, words, songs and friends.**

**Jesus, our brother, you stretch your Way before us  
and summon us to follow.**

**You walk with us, beyond comfort, toward Life.**

**Spirit, our breath you gather us together to send us out from this place with  
courage and joy,**

**into our communities, our nation, our world.**

**Help us to walk expectantly, act hopefully, live joyfully,  
and love as you do.**

**Amen.**

(Carla Grosch-Miller)