

“Following the Good News”

Mark 1: 14 – 20

January 21, 2018

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Good news? Good news?! What so *good* about it?

That’s what I thought on that first day. I will never forget it! I was in washing the dishes when my husband Zebedee came running in, “Salome, the boys have taken off!”

Then he proceeded to tell me all about it. The boat had been pulled up on the shore, they had been out all-night fishing, had come back, sent their catch off to the market and were going about the daily chore of mending nets when, all of a sudden, Jesus walked by with Simon and Andrew following behind. The boys, James and John, dropped their nets, just left them and their dad standing in the boat and followed along. I couldn’t believe it! Standing there, with my hands dripping with dishwater, I looked at my husband in amazement. “And you just let them go? Just like that? How could you?”

Well, how could he not? After all, they weren’t boys anymore; they were young men, able to decide their future for themselves. They had grown up on the shores of Lake Galilee, grown up fishing and were good at it. We had a good business going. But they were young and restless and impressionable. Our lives weren’t easy, being under the thumb of the Roman Empire, having to bow to Caesar, having to pay extra taxes.

Our boys, James and John, they had heard about Jesus. The news of him was all over the region, news of this new leader, some were even whispering ‘messiah’. The young men like Simon and Andrew and my sons were ready for a movement, waiting for the chance to gain a foothold for our people who were oppressed under Empire.

But that day, I was scared. “Why?” you ask? Were you listening to the reading? If so, you heard those first words and know where my fear came from! Those first words named it all. “Now after John was arrested...”. John the baptizer. People for all over, even from Jerusalem, had been flocking to the Jordan River to be baptized by John His message was powerful, a message of repentance, change. Then Jesus came to John to be baptized and John named him as the one everyone was waiting for!

And they the arrested John. Was this really a time to go public with any kind of movement, or to follow the one who John named as their leader? But many had had enough. So, when Jesus walked by the boat that day, James and John jumped at the chance to follow.

Sometimes it’s like that, isn’t it, sometimes the call – the direction one is supposed to go – is so very clear and just like my boys, we jump at the chance to follow. “Immediately” as it is written. But what I learned with my boys and with my own life is that you don’t just become a disciple of Jesus in one ‘ah ha! moment of clarity. It takes a lifetime!

None of the disciples got it at first, got what Jesus was all about. Peter, oh Peter, known to us first as Simon. Always trying so hard but always putting his foot in his mouth. And then there was Thomas who at first stood by Jesus then doubted. But I shouldn't talk just about them. My sons were no different. It's right there in Mark's gospel, about ten chapters later, kind of embarrassing. It seems that my sons were itching for a taste of glory, asking Jesus, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left." All that time with Jesus and they still didn't get it. And I'm not sure that any of us really get 'it', that being a disciple, that following Jesus is not about riches or power or prestige but about humility and service.

That first day by the lake was the beginning of a life-changing journey. I don't think they really knew that. And as I followed too, I don't think I really knew that at first either. Do you? In following, Jesus wasn't asking us to add one more task to our busy schedules. Not join the church, join a committee, do X, Y, and Z...although that's very important, don't get me wrong! But to follow Jesus means something more. He was and is calling us into a new way of being, a new way of living. A way of living where love and trust in God replaced fear; fear of the future, fear of others, fear of failure...all of those fears we carry around.

It was a call to embrace the Good News – no, it wasn't Good News on that first day but then I came to understand. As I followed, I realized I was being called into a new way of being, where a sense of God's abundance of grace replaced all of those negatives of fear, regret, jealousy. The Good News, the Gospel of Jesus the Christ, was and still is about his talk of kingdom. I like to say 'kindom' because Kingdom seems to confuse you all with monarchy and power. Kindom is community, and it seems to me that that's what Jesus was announcing, that way of God where *nothing is broke and everyone belongs*. That kingdom/kindom talk. Seems to me like a whole lot of people in the world today need to hear that. So much brokenness; of spirit, of body, of family systems, of government, of God's creation. God's kingdom/kindom is when nothing is broken and everyone belongs – no us verses them, no one group better than another. It's where each one of us is healed from that which has broken us; the hurts, the inner wounds because, well, when you follow Jesus, you realize what he's about – healing the broken and assuring everyone that they are children of God, that they belong.

You probably are looking at me and thinking right now that I'm just an old woman living in a dream world. Yes, it is a dream, something not yet realized. At the same time, Jesus opened our eyes to show us that the kindom way of being is all around us as well, as he taught us about this God of grace and let loose even more fully that power of love in the world!

I heard your preacher say earlier that you are in the church season of 'E'...ep...it's a big word and I wasn't familiar with it. Can you help me out? What season are you in? And what does that mean to you? God's light shining in the world? God made manifest...as in a sudden grasp or understanding of the essence of someone or something.

I think this story of Jesus calling my sons and the other disciples is because it seems like an epiphany story. That Jesus, shining in all of his glory, walked by and they immediately

understood that essence of him that was God; that they immediately 'got it', this good news of the coming of God's kingdom where nothing is broken and everyone belongs. You all can read the story and get that because you know the rest of the story, as do I now. You know about how he healed and helped, about how he welcomed in and went out of his way to connect with even the most outcast. And you know about how they tried to crucify this power of love but couldn't and he was raised to live and work in the hearts of each of us, reminding us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in him...and oh isn't that good news?

That day, on the banks of Lake Galilee, we didn't know all of that. My sons knew that there was something there, something that called to them that they wanted to follow. It was in the following, in the day to day walk of their lives, that they began to really get the essence of God.

Jesus told them that they would be fishers of people. You know, fishing isn't just about when you are out there in the boat and that one moment of casting and pulling in the net. No, there are those mundane chores and moments as well; mending the nets, cleaning the boat. There's probably something to that when thinking about discipleship, about following, as well. It's not all glamorous moments of immediately dropping everything and waving your hands in praise. There IS the tending and mending as well.

So enough about me and my boys! What about you? What about this day and age? Do you feel called – oh not to this ordained clergy stuff that you all have today, I mean, called to follow, to be a part of ushering in this kingdom of God where nothing is broke and everyone belongs? Don't worry if you haven't had a call of clarity where you drop everything 'immediately'...not many people do. Like I said before, even if you have such a moment, it's still a lifelong journey of learning how to follow. A journey where you are challenged over and over again to drop your old nets and pick up new ones of unconditional love, forgiveness, humility, servanthood.

But what a joy to spend one's life journeying together with others who, just like you, are stumbling along trying to figure it out. Because every once in awhile, in a word, a song, an action, a sunrise, one of us gets a glimpse of this kingdom way of being, this way of radical love that is so very different than what the world calls us to follow, this way of being that Jesus spoke about and lived...and we drop our nets and follow that Good News.