

Lucia Lloyd's sermon
January 8, 2011
Mark 1:14-20

Epiphany 3, Year B

Jesus is on the move again and his followers are trying to keep up. In Mark's fast-paced gospel Jesus is already traveling when his ministry begins, and he's telling everyone the time has come. As Mark 1:15 puts it, Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news." You can feel Jesus' pace here: when the time is fulfilled, you don't mess around, you go with it.

Listen for the motion and the immediacy in this passage: "As Jesus **passed along** the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, '**Follow** me and I will make you fish for people.' And **immediately** they **left** their nets and **followed** him. As he **went a little farther**, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. **Immediately** he called them; and they **left** their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and **followed** him."

I expect that they have no idea what they're getting themselves in for with this fish for people thing. There seems to be something compelling about Jesus that makes these guys drop everything and go, some gut sense that he is someone they want to follow. But have they carefully thought through the full implications this will have on their lives? I don't think so. There seems to be something in them that recognizes instantly that Jesus is a person they want to follow. Their attention is on Jesus. Do they have a complete understanding of what is involved in Jesus' metaphor of making them fish for people? It doesn't sound like it. Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Mark's gospel is specific on the fact that these fishermen fish with nets. These are not the kind of fishermen who sit in a boat with a fishing pole and a line and a particular kind of bait. These are the kind of fishermen who put out nets so that they scoop up **all** the fish that are there. When Jesus makes them fish for people, he has them fishing with nets that scoop up all the fish that are there.

When Jesus calls these fishermen, it is not to be alone with Jesus one-on-one in an individual relationship. Jesus scoops up his disciples together, Simon and his brother Andrew together, joined soon after by James and his brother John together, and he tells them right away that they're going to be fishing for others too. Jesus scoops up these disciples together in his net, without asking them which other fish they would prefer to associate with. But they want to follow Jesus, so they go along with the others who want to follow Jesus. They do what Jesus says, even when the other followers seem to them to be, as they say, a little fishy.

This might seem like a minor point, but as we go through the gospels it turns out to be enormous. The issue of who Jesus associates with comes up again and again and again in the gospels, both with the Pharisees and with the disciples. They are absolutely scandalized that Jesus' standards are so low. They are horrified that Jesus includes among his followers people who are impure, people whose lives are not righteous enough, people whose beliefs are not orthodox enough, people who do not follow the laws of the scriptures, people who are not holy enough. There are people who are not fervent enough and people who are way too fervent. There are people who are not respectable enough and people who are way too respectable. There are people who are devoted and people who are skeptical. There are people who are only in it for the miracles and people who don't even believe in the miracles. The followers of Jesus include tax collectors and prostitutes, Roman soldiers and lepers, highly religious people and outcasts that the highly religious people wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. The only thing they have in common is that they want to follow Jesus.

And Jesus keeps insisting on telling parables whose point is that righteousness is very different from what we expect, and that the people who enter the kingdom of heaven are the ones we least expect.

Jesus gets flak from all sides on the issue of who he associates with. And still he insists on violating all the rules and having all these impure people as his closest companions. They don't automatically become pure once they follow him, either. The gospels show the disciples themselves are just as prone to anger, cowardice, selfishness, and jealousy at the end of Jesus' ministry as they were at the beginning. They argue with each other and they argue with Jesus. And Jesus loves them. Jesus loves them all.

All of that begins in today's scripture: it begins in Jesus not calling Simon or Andrew to be alone with Jesus one-on-one in an individual relationship, but Jesus calling them to follow him and fish for people.

We say, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" and we mean it. There are no exceptions. The Episcopal Church Welcomes You. There are people in The Episcopal Church who are way more liberal than I am and there are people in The Episcopal Church who are way more conservative than I am. There are people who seem kind of wacky to me, and there are people who consider me kind of wacky. There are women bishops in the Episcopal Church and there are people in The Episcopal Church who are opposed to women being bishops. There are gay bishops in the Episcopal Church and there are people in The Episcopal Church who are opposed to gay people being bishops. The Episcopal Church has people who have been part of The Episcopal Church their entire lives; The Episcopal Church has people who are new; The Episcopal Church has people who left and then came back again. The Episcopal Church welcomes them all. The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church is a mix of people who want to follow Jesus: old and new, gay and straight, believers and seekers. Welcoming everyone is a top priority for St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Anyone who has been part of The Episcopal Church their entire lives will be warmly welcomed by St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Anyone who is new will be warmly welcomed by St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Anyone who has left will be warmly welcomed by St. Stephen's Episcopal Church.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church welcomes you. Jesus loves us all.