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Leaving the Nets Behind

Mark 1:14-20

January 11, 2004

“I heard the call of God on Christmas Eve, and I almost missed it.” Those were the words of Pastor Dennis Brown to his folks at Carson Valley on the Sunday after Christmas. Carson Valley is where I worshipped with some of my family while on vacation two weeks ago and where Pastor Dennis serving as the interim pastor. As the interim pastor, Dennis lives in Virginia and drives to Carson Valley (out near Altoona) for several days each week. But that morning he told us that for him, the entire day before Christmas had been one long miserable day, with just one problem piling up upon another.

He said that he and his wife had had the evening meal with some friends, one of whom was the pastor of his home church. During the meal his friend asked if he would have a prayer at that evening's Christmas Eve service. “By that time,” Dennis said, “I was feeling so miserable, I wasn't even sure if I was going to the Christmas Eve service, and I certainly didn't think I wanted to say a prayer. But, reluctantly, I agreed that I would.”

“I went to the service. I sat through the songs and the readings still feeling sorry for myself. Then it came my turn to pray. In the midst of the prayer,” he said, “I again felt God's presence and again experienced the wonder of what God had done through obedience of a teenage mother on that first Christmas night. And,” he said, “I also experienced anew the grace of God in my life, as he softened my own hard heart with his love.”

When was the last time you heard the call of God in your life? I know that's the kind of question that can raise all sorts of other questions. What do you mean – the call of God? Does God still speak to people? How does God speak? What do you mean by *hear*?

In answering those questions, I would like to direct your attention to the passage that Jessie read for us this morning. Let us together look at what Jesus said and did. Again, let me say that today we are continuing the series, *Seeing Jesus Again – for the First Time*. As I mentioned last week, I am doing this series because I fear that all too often we think we have Jesus all figured out. And yet, how quickly we seek to answer the question, “What would Jesus do?” without doing the very necessary task of looking at the scriptures, and taking the time to learn about what he said and what he did and at what that might mean for you and I.

And so now let's look at Mark chapter 1 (vs 14)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came 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.”

Herod had arrested John the Baptist. John the cousin of Jesus. John the prophet of God who had broken the four hundred years of silence. And now what? Would this powerful new movement of God be squashed? Would God be silent another four hundred years? Were the powers of this world really stronger than the power of God?

In the midst of this crazy mixed up time, Jesus came proclaiming the *Good News of the kingdom of God*. The kingdom of God means the rule of God . . . the reign of God. In spite of the evidence that would appear to support the claims that the powers of this world are firmly in control, there is another world. There is another power; there is another king and another kingdom.

Jesus came proclaiming the good news that God's kingdom is near. No, it is not here yet . . . not fully . . . not completely. But in the person of Jesus the kingdom is beginning to come.

But how do we become a part of God's kingdom. What did Jesus say, “*Repent and believe!*” Recognize the presence of that kingdom and give it your allegiance. Jesus came announcing

the nearness of God's kingdom and inviting men and women to follow him. In vss. 16ff., we see his call to four men:

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.

The story is both wonderfully simple and incredibly profound. Four men, working in their family businesses, were called by Jesus and Mark says *immediately* they responded. There is so much about the story that we do not know. Mark does not tell us whether or not these men had heard Jesus before. Was this something totally spontaneous, or had there been some previous conversations. (Other gospel writers seem to imply that maybe there probably was).

And we know almost nothing about their families. None of the gospels tell us of the discussions that surely had to occur in their homes. “You're going to do what? Who's going to help your father with the business? What about your wife and children? What will you eat? Who's going to do your laundry? Who's going to look after us in our old age? I suspect someone was asking some of those questions and probably a whole lot more.

Peter, Andrew, James and John left the comfortable and the familiar to become the followers of a travelling rabbi. And their world was never again the same.

Have you heard the call of Jesus? The call comes at several different levels. It comes as we first become aware of the spiritual realities of life. I wrote this message as I sat surrounded by a wealth of physical sights and sounds. As I wrote part of this message, I was sitting in a comfortable recliner in our living room. I could look out through the large picture window in the front of the house across the dormant yet still beautiful Lancaster County farmland receding to the hills of the north. I saw the mix of puffy clouds and blue sky. I heard the sound of Matt listening to a movie down in the family room. And at that point I was still very aware of my cold (complete with scratchy throat, stuffy head, and generally feeling worn out). We are physical creatures who live in a very physical world.

But I also know there is more – much more. We are surrounded by spiritual realities that we only dimly understand. Do we know it?

A part of the call is sensing the something more in life. That awareness can come in many different ways and places. For some of us we began to get a clue, while still children as we knelt beside our beds and Mom or Dad helped us to say our prayers. For some of us, that awareness came in our teen years, perhaps at an evening vesper service while at camp. For some of us that awareness came as young adults, perhaps as we gathered in a Bible study with friends. For some of us that awareness came after a major personal failure, perhaps divorce or a bankruptcy and we knew that by ourselves, relying on our own resources and our own reserves we would just not make it. That awareness comes at different times and in different ways, but regardless of how it comes a part of God's call is recognizing that there is more to life than just what we can hear and touch and see and taste and smell.

Jesus called the disciples to “Come . . . follow me!” It is a call to follow a person. It is not about having a well defined and logically defensible belief system. It is not about how hard we work. We are invited to come and follow Jesus. To put our trust in him completely for this life and the next.

Do you remember a time when you left behind the comfortable and the familiar. For some of us, this might have been when we went off to college for the first time. For some of us this was when we went off to the service (or off to volunteer service). For some this was becoming a parent (This whole parenting thing comes without an instruction manual. Sure

there are plenty of people who want to offer advice – most of which conflicts with the advice that someone else is offering.) Or perhaps it was when you took on a new job in a completely different part of the country. Come follow me! That's part of the equation. That's the first part of the call. It is a call to follow Jesus.

But there's a second part of the call. Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John *and I will make you fish for people*. We are called for a purpose. We are called for a task.

I fear that too many Christians believe that the only obligation they have in this life is to show up at worship, say a few prayers and maybe, occasionally put some money in the offering plate. I fear that some believe that the only obligation we have as a believer is to just sit with each other on a Sunday morning and commiserate about what crazy, mixed up, miserable world there is out there. If the only thing we can do is talk about Jesus and me . . . if the only song we can sing is “I come to the garden alone”, then we are only half a Christian. Is there such a thing as a half a Christian? I don't know.

I do know that God has a task, a ministry in mind that he wants each one of us to do. For the scriptures firmly teach, both here and in many other places as well, that we are called to be sent. We are called because God has a task he wants us to fulfill. God has created us with purpose and potential to bring his love to a hurting and dying world.

Reflecting on his call many years later, Peter would write these words to the church, (I Peter 2:9)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And yes, some of the ministries that God wants us to do will occur inside the walls of this building, teaching our children, leading in worship, listening to and praying for each other. However, the ministry inside the walls of the building is just a small fraction of the ministry that God wants us to be doing

Have you heard the call of God this past week? In the past year? In your life-time? Now I know some people are thinking, “Yes, but I'm just not a public speaker. I can't sing. I scare children. I'm too young. I'm too old.” We have all kinds of excuses. That's exactly what they are . . . excuses.

I recently read of one pastor who invited his listeners to take two fingers on their right hand and to put those two fingers on their left wrist. Do you feel anything? You do? Good! You *should*. What's the point? The point is, as long as you still have a pulse, as long as you are still breathing, God has something you can do. Or as another pastor once wrote, the only ability that God needs is our availability.

Jesus did not come looking for the super spiritual or the intellectual elite or the rich, the famous and the powerful. Jesus began with four fishermen. Whatever your occupation . . . regardless of whether you are employed, unemployed or retired, God has something you can do. Truck drivers, teachers, home makers, carpenters, nurse, students, salesmen (or saleswomen) . . . God has something he wants you to do.

The question is not, “Does God still speak?” The real question is “Are we listening?” Have we heard the call of God coming, asking us to trust him. Do we daily hear the call of God asking us to be his hands, his feet, his ears, his eyes, sharing his love with this lost and hurting world. Peter, Andrew, James and John left the comfortable and familiar for the great journey of faith. Dare we do the same?