

Recreating Purpose

Text: Mark 1:14-20

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This is the first week my husband and I are “empty nesters.” After 24 years of having the daily routines and commitments of parenthood, all three of our daughters – like the saying goes of Elvis – have left the building. I share this today because Bruce and I have come to a new moment in our lives. The moment is not dissimilar from the moment described in Mark’s gospel. There’s a word in Greek which comes to mind ~ “Kairos” ~ a propitious moment for decision or action. It can be thought of as a good opportunity for transformation... for creativity. We are all in such a moment, actually. We are at the beginning of a new calendar year, a new decade, a new administration in our government, a pivotal moment in the pandemic as the COVID-19 vaccination is being more widely distributed bringing us that much closer to being together again. Here at First Church, we are in a moment of transition between settled pastors, and we are soon to adopt new lay leadership and new members on teams and workgroups. Kairos. Such times are pregnant with possibility.

Simon, Andrew, James and John experience a Kairos moment when Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee and called them to follow him. Jesus calls these four ordinary people out of their ordinary lives, “Follow me” Jesus says. There is so much wrapped up in those two words. I think of them as an invitation with three levels of meaning.

A literal translation of Jesus’ words might read, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers for people.” When Jesus says this, he is describing a new way of being, a re-framing of their identity. That’s why Jesus could tell them they would still be fisherman. But now they would fish for people. “Follow me” is an invitation to re-creating purpose.

He could just as easily have said to the carpenters, “Follow me, and you will build the kingdom of heaven.” To the farmers, “Follow me, and you will grow God’s people.” To the doctors, “Follow me, and you will heal the brokenness of the world,” To the teachers, “Follow me, and you will open minds and hearts to the presence of God.” To the parents, “Follow me, and you will nurture new life.”

Jesus called these two sets of brothers. Mark records no discussions, no questions, no good-byes. They simply left. Listen to what Mark writes:

“Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

“They left their father Zebedee in the boat... and followed him.”

If it had been us, would we have followed? I’m afraid that if Mark were writing about me, when he gets to the part when Jesus says, “Follow me” – Mark would write, “and immediately the

questions followed." "Where are we going? What will we do? How long will we be gone? What do I need to pack? Where will we stay?"

Jesus' call requires our giving up the desire for answers and certainty because Jesus' call usually results in more questions than answers. There is no certainty in what happens next. Jesus does not offer a map, an itinerary, or a destination, only an invitation. This is not the type of journey one can prepare for. This is an inner journey, a journey into the deepest part of our being, the place where God resides. It's not about planning and organizing, making lists or packing supplies. It's not that easy. If anything this journey is about leaving things behind.

The invitation, "follow me," is also an invitation to leave behind, to leave our nets, our boats and even our fathers. That is the hard part for most of us. We're pretty good at accumulating and clinging, but not so good at letting go. More often than not our spiritual growth involves some kind of letting go. We never get anywhere new as long as we're unwilling to leave where we are. We accept Jesus' invitation to follow, not by packing up, but by letting go.

I wonder: What are the nets that entangle us? What are the little boats that contain our life? Who are the fathers from whom we seek identity, value or approval? What do we need to let go of and leave behind so we might follow Jesus?

The letting go is not about changing careers, disowning our family or moving to a new town. It is about the freedom to be fully human and in so being discover God's divinity within us. We let go so that our life may be reoriented, so that we can now travel in a new direction, so that we may be open to receive the life of God anew. When we let go, everything is transformed – including our nets, boats and fathers.

Theologian Frederick Buechner wrote, "the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Follow me is also Jesus' invitation to discipleship. It isn't about task, it is about identity. Discipleship is a way of life. It is about letting go of life as we define it, so we can receive God's life for us. That really means becoming more fully and authentically who we already are.

If we decide to follow Jesus, to say yes to his invitation, there is no certainty about what happens next. God knows more than we do, though, and can be trusted to guide us and care for us along the way. Jesus' call is often costly and difficult. It can result in going places we would rather not go, speaking words we would rather not speak, and confronting people and situations we would rather not confront. We can trust that God will strengthen and defend us even on the most perilous journey. Jesus' call is into an unknown tomorrow. We don't know what the result of following the call will be. But we are called to say "yes"" and to follow anyway.

Trust is the key. Simon, Andrew, James and John knew that. They followed without hesitation into an uncertain future. They didn't second-guess the one doing the calling. They didn't allow anxiety over the unknown to overwhelm them. They trusted. That trust made all the difference. When Jesus calls, we can trust in God's love and care.

This is a Kairos moment for us: as individuals and as the community of First Church. As we reframe our identity and re-create purpose, as we leave behind what was, and as we embrace the call to discipleship we also ask the questions of who God is calling us to be and what God is calling us to do *now*. Friends, this is the journey of faith. May we trust that God calls us to a purpose that will satisfy our deepest yearning. May we trust God to guide, protect and love us along the way, wherever the journey may lead.

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