

Epiphany 3 (B)
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Text: Mark 1:14-20

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A few months ago our internet provider added a wonderful new feature to our email service. It's a more sophisticated filter than what we've had before, and it blocks almost all of the really annoying spam. So I'm no longer receiving letters from any wealthy Nigerian widows asking for my help with their husbands' fortune. And I'm not receiving any offers for powerful painkilling drugs at bargain prices. And I'm not being contacted by any obscure banks informing me that they need to update my personal information. I'm not receiving any of those annoying emails that are really just phishing for information. And I love it, because I really hate those intrusions into my life. I even hate having to give them as much of my time as it takes to delete them. Because the truth is, I just don't want to be bothered.

I think that's part of the reason I'm so amazed by how Simon and Andrew, and James and John, respond to Jesus—at least, in the way Mark tells it. Jesus begins his ministry announcing the arrival of the reign of God, and he's passing along the Sea of Galilee, where the two sets of brothers make their living as fishermen. Jesus says, "Follow me!" And they do! Immediately, they leave their nets, they leave family members, and they follow Jesus. I'm amazed, because I wonder how they knew that Jesus was someone they could trust, how they knew this wasn't some sort of scam. I wonder why they didn't turn back to their work because there was a lot to do and they just didn't want to be bothered with this sort of intrusion into their lives.

But Mark is not interested in telling us whether or how these first disciples had heard of Jesus before. Mark is not interested in telling us about any sort of movement in their lives that led them to recognize Jesus as someone worth following, as the One sent by God to fulfill God's promises. Mark wants us to see and feel that in Jesus there is something so powerful and true and right that it summons us, calling for a sense of urgency in our response. One of Mark's favorite words is "immediately," and we hear it twice in our short little reading. Immediately Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus. Immediately James and John left their father in the boat and followed Jesus. Mark wants us to feel that we could have done the same. Through the rest of the story we'll find out what it is that makes Jesus' call so powerful and true and right. Through the story of his teaching, his life and death and resurrection we'll discover what is so compelling about Jesus, and how God is at work in Jesus' life. But here, at the beginning, Mark wants to set a tone. He wants to open our eyes to recognize what is at stake. Jesus brings good news that God is setting all things right, God is making this creation whole, and God wants us to be a part of it.

We may not be called, like Simon and Andrew and the others, to leave home or family or work. Instead, Jesus' call comes to us in our homes and families, in our place of work, in our friendships, in the middle of life. Jesus calls each of us to be his person, to let the things he is about shape all of life for us. So we live each day with compassion, attentive to the needs of those around us. We live each day with forgiveness, resisting the urge to hold a grudge or strike back at someone who's done us wrong. We live each day with generosity and service, recognizing that all we have and all we are has been entrusted to us for God's purposes. And in all of our relationships—as a spouse or parent or child, as an employer or worker, as a citizen, as a friend or neighbor—we seek to be available for God's purposes.

I wonder, though, whether there might be things in our lives that would block Christ's call to us, that would filter it out and make it more difficult for us to follow him and be part of God's work of making creation whole. There are lots of things that demand our attention, that call for our time. Do you ever feel too preoccupied with other things to give Jesus' call much thought? If we're too busy, or have too many worries pressing in on us, it can be hard to be available for God's purposes at all. Or maybe it's a matter of being overly concerned about what others might think. Or maybe we're really attached to having our life just the way we want it, or attached to our stuff, our possessions. For all of those kinds of reasons, Mark tells us about the amazing response of Simon and Andrew, and James and John. They saw something in Jesus. They recognized powerful and true and right. And they knew that it was a matter of urgency that they respond. Mark presents them for us as an example, because he wants to help us do the same, to know that we have been called by Jesus to follow, and that it is a matter of urgency for us too.

What else might help us say “yes”? For me, one of the most important factors that has helped me say yes to Jesus' call has been having people in my life who showed me how beautiful and lively it could be to belong to Jesus and follow in his way. First of all were my parents who gave an example of commitment, who made faith a priority. But there have also been youth group leaders and teachers and congregational elders who helped me see what a wonderful thing it is to be in love with God. They've who showed me their passion for learning the Bible, or their diligence in prayer. All of these people made a difference for me. And I continue to be blessed with people who show me what following Jesus looks like. Here in this congregation are friends who inspire me with their strong compassion and service, and graceful caring and hospitality, and joyful sharing in community. I wonder who the examples of faith are in your life. Who are the mentors that model for you what following Jesus looks like, and who help you say “yes”?

Every one of us has different gifts, different abilities, different life experiences. So the ways we follow Jesus may not all look the same. When Jesus called Simon and the others, they were fishermen. So Jesus tells them he will have them “fishing for people.” What will your part in God’s purposes look like? Maybe you’re an architect, and Jesus will have you drawing up plans for a more just and peaceful world. Or maybe you’re a parent, and Jesus will have you nurturing hope for God’s people. Or maybe you’re an engineer, and Jesus will have you designing a future full of life and blessing for God’s creation. All of us, though, share one thing. Jesus is calling—calling us to follow him—to follow in his way, to be his people, to be about his work. And the Spirit of God is at work in our lives, nudging us, empowering us to recognize that Jesus’ call is truly urgent. He is calling us to our own truest life, to belong to our Creator and be God’s person in the world. Don’t let anything keep you from hearing Jesus’ call, and giving your whole heart to follow. Amen