

“Should I Stay or Should I Go?”
Mark 1:14-20
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Our scripture comes from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1.

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.”

*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 Gospel of Mark can easily leave us breathless.

In his matter-of-fact style, Mark takes us quickly from event to event, with little or no transition at all. We are only 14 verses into the first chapter and we’ve already had:

- the arrival of John the baptist,
- Jesus’ arrival and baptism
- and then he’s cast out into the wilderness for forty days of temptation by the devil.

Whew! That’s a lot.

Few details are given about any of the events, so one can conclude that what Mark does choose to include really matters.

Now, at this point, John has been arrested and we encounter Jesus in Galilee, the place where he begins his ministry.

The pace of Mark’s storytelling creates a sense of urgency - something is always happening!

And then he stitches each scene together with his favorite adverb - *ethous* in Greek - “immediately.”¹

Immediately Simon and Andrew leave their nets and follow Jesus.

Immediately Jesus calls on James and John, and they, too, drop their nets and **immediately** follow Jesus.

¹ Feasting on the Gospels: Mark, p. 27

Immediately, immediately, immediately...

This is one of those scripture passages that is great for dramatic reenactment. Jesus arrives, calls the fishermen to follow, and they immediately throw down their nets and go.

It seems brave and exciting and, well, quite easy.

And Mark's matter-of-fact reporting keeps it that way.

It makes it easy to keep the imagination from wandering.

After all, by verse 21, just after our passage, Jesus and the disciples are already in Capernaum.

There is work to be done!

There is no time to dwell on the unknowns.

But the unknowns are often what captivate me most about a passage like this.

Don't these men have families?

Work to finish that day?

We know Zebedee and the other hired workers probably weren't that happy that James and John just up and left in the middle of a work day.

Do they ever go back to finish things up?

Don't they have other things to which they've committed themselves?

How can they really just drop their nets and go immediately?

Does anyone really do that?

These questions have floated through my brain as I've reflected on this passage this past week.

As you know, my husband Bart and I moved here 2 and a half years ago, following his call to become the pastor of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church.

So as two people who had to leave two congregations, sell a house in order to buy a house, moved us, our stuff and our large, energetic dog all the way across the country from Virginia, I almost have to laugh at the idea of just dropping the very thing you're doing and just going.

Just following.

Saying Adios and never looking back.

Does anyone really do that?

I know that our move here didn't happen without a lot of long to-do lists, detailed coordination, and of course, a lot of patience.

We didn't just drop things and go.

We planned and prepared and then braced ourselves for the huge transition.

And I suspect we are not alone when it comes to this kind of preparation.

Rarely does one drop everything and literally go, immediately.

And the truth is that sometimes--maybe even most of the time--following Jesus doesn't even mean we're called to physically move or go anywhere.

One pastor suggests when reading this passage that "We may need to remind ourselves of this obvious fact: not everyone is called to leave the boats and nets, to leave family and place.

The vast majority of us are called to stay where we are as we serve God."²

So what does that look like, staying, and yet following Jesus?

It may not sound as adventurous or glamorous as going places in the name of Jesus, but it's still what so many of us are called to do.

Come, and follow Jesus, but do it *right where you are!*

The urgency is still there.

So what does it mean to follow Jesus right here, immediately, in your everyday life?

Theologian Karoline Lewis thinks that, [the idea of] "immediately" can be less about marking time and more about describing action.

Immediately does not only designate a when but a what.

Not only a place in time, but an event that changes the meaning of life.

Granted, the disciples have no clue at this point how life has been changed.

But we know. **And maybe immediately is all we can do, all we can manage.**

Because, preparation?

Maybe it makes faith matters worse.

Builds up anticipation, expectations.

And then, when things do not go as planned?

Maybe a life of faith can only happen in immediately, in the surprising, sudden, profound epiphany of God at work, God revealed in our lives."

If we view following Jesus, or discipleship, as a task, then it's easy to become preoccupied with the things we think we ought to be doing.

Or when things don't go as planned.

And then we might lose focus on the bigger picture because we think we've figured out the perfect formula for good discipleship.

But if we understand discipleship being about identity, then we begin to be open to the unexpected, urgent call, to live differently, to drop the security nets and move out of our comfort zones.

We have to be open to being transformed by things that are unscheduled and make us nervous.

² Bane Sevier, Melissa. Blog, "Contemplative Viewfinder," entry "Armchair Travelers," posted January 20, 2015.

We don't know why those four fisherman dropped everything they were doing to follow Jesus.

But by doing so, we know that lives were changed. *They* were changed.

Ted Smith, a professor at Vanderbilt University Divinity School suggests that the best translation of v. 17 is not how the NRSV translation reads, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

He suggests that a more literal translation is better because it's about an identity, not a task.

He suggests we understand it as "Follow me, and I will make you to become fishers for people."

Smith suggests, "There is a world of difference between "I will make you fish" and "I will make you to become fishers."

"I will make you fish" gives us one more activity to work into our datebooks.

("Right, Jesus, fish for people. How about every fourth Monday? Can anyone else do fourth Mondays?")

But "I will make you to become fishers"? That promises a whole new life."³

Jesus is not calling these first disciples into work as much as he is calling them into relationship.

A closer relationship with him, and with each other.

And Jesus issues this same call to us--to be in genuine and real relationships with the people around us, and to be in those relationships the way Jesus was and is in relationship with his disciples and with us: bearing each other's burdens, caring for each other and especially the vulnerable, holding onto each other through thick and thin, always with the hope and promise of God's abundant grace.⁴

This is how we can respond to Jesus' call to follow *right here*.

We don't have to physically go anywhere to do these things.

Discipleship can mean living right where you are, but living a changed life.

One that reflects the choice to follow Jesus.

It means walking the walk and talking the talk.

May we never forget that we don't have to go anywhere to follow Jesus' call to discipleship.

³ "Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 1," p. 289

⁴ Lose, David. "Fishers for People," www.workingpreacher.org, January 20, 2014.