

An Urgent Mission

January 21, 2018

Mark 1: 14-20

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.



Ever since Jesus began His ministry, the church has had an urgent mission: to save the lost. We can paraphrase the mission of the church with many other words, but the bottom line is that the goal of every church should be to help all people find a saving relationship through Jesus Christ. The mission statement of the global United Methodist Church is: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world". Here our mission statement has the same underlying message, just different words: "To bring people to Christ... to help people grow deep in Christ". Today we delve into our call to follow this Jesus, this man of mystery, as we seek to be obedient disciples. Let us pray.

Our passage today opens with a proclamation by Jesus. It is a simple and direct statement. Verse fifteen reads, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news"*. This statement remains as true today as it was the second it rolled off of Jesus' lips. The kingdom is right here now, in our midst. To be saved we must repent of the sin in our life and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. In one sense, to have faith is a very simple thing. But to live it out, on a daily basis, is another matter. In the same way, the mission of the church is simple to define and even to understand. However, to live it out on a daily basis is a much harder path to follow.



In our scripture passage for today, Jesus came along the seashore in Galilee and He saw a couple of guys there fishing. Simon and Andrew were there, just casting their nets into the water. Jesus called out to them, saying, *"Follow me and I will make you fish for people"*. They *immediately* dropped what they were doing and joined Jesus. There was no time to consider the alternatives, no time to consider the consequences or ramifications of accepting this call. They simply followed. As this little group continues to stroll along the seashore, Jesus sees a couple of more fishermen out in their boats. They are out there mending their nets. It has probably been a long night fishing. Jesus calls them and they too leave all behind to follow Jesus. We do not know what Jesus said to them, but James and John become the next disciples to join the team. No time to ponder their options, to get things in order, to evaluate the offer. They simply follow.

We have no clue why these four men leave their jobs, their families, everything to go and follow this man who called them from the seashore. Likewise, we have no clue as to why Jesus would select these four men or any of the other twelve disciples, for that matter. We have no clues as to special abilities or exceptional faith that is inherent in any of the twelve that would qualify them to be followers of Jesus. In spite this lack of information, what we do know is this: there was an urgency in Jesus' call that led these men to make a choice that makes no sense to us. And we also know that from this point on, the lives of Andrew and Peter and James and John would never be the same.

Whatever it was that day, whatever they sensed about Jesus, whatever they could hear in His voice - it awakened in the first disciples an urgency that overrode any need for fuller or deeper understanding of who was calling or even a glimpse into what may lay ahead. The urgency of the call and the one who was calling led them to take a step of faith. These two things are also true today. When one chooses to follow Jesus, it initially takes a step of faith. And like it was with those first disciples, thereafter, life is never the same.



Like these first disciples, once we each made the choice to follow Jesus, our lives were forever changed. And like these four, for almost all of us there was an initial sense of

excitement and energy as Jesus started to change us and to work in our lives and to reshape who we were at our core. For many of us, our faith in God was something that we initially felt very compelled to share with others in our lives.

We wanted others to know and experience this 'thing' that we now had. We wanted others to have this joy and peace and contentment that we now had. Can you remember those days and that feeling? Can you remember how it was when you first found that personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Can you remember how your faith felt almost contagious?

As our faith journey continues, however, we often lose that initial fire and we become comfortable in our faith. Some would say we become complacent or content. Our faith slips into the routine or falls into a rut – go to church on Sunday, say a prayer before the family meal, yadda, yadda, yadda. Can you relate? Has your faith become too comfortable, too routine?

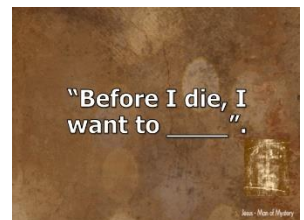
Every once in a while, though, God will intervene in our lives and shake us up a bit. Significant events and occurrences have a way of jump-starting our faith again. For Candy Chang, life was just rolling along. Work was good, she enjoyed her family and circle of friends. Then one day a dear friend suddenly died. In an instant, she began to question what was meaningful and important in her life. Candy realized how complacent she had become in the routine.

Then one morning in the days immediately following the loss of her dear friend, she looked out her front window and saw an abandoned house across the street. She wondered if that old neglected house could be used to help her and other people find some meaning and purpose in life. She got an idea to paint the front of the house with black chalkboard paint and to stencil onto it one simple

statement over and over. She stenciled "Before I die, I want to..." over and over. She left some chalk out by the wall and soon people were stopping to fill in the blank space behind the stenciled words. Some people's words were silly and some were profound. Some contained great hope and some held deep sadness. Here is a snapshot of one such wall. People wrote things such as, "Before I die, I want to... sing for millions... live off the grid... hold her one more time... follow my childhood dream..." Walls have been built or installed all over the world. They have become places where people can express their joy and their loneliness, their dreams and their failures. These walls have become places of connection in a world that too often is fractured and disconnected.



If you were given the opportunity to complete this sentence, what would you write? "Before I die, I want to...." Take a minute to ponder this question. What would you write on the wall? What deep sense of urgency might come from spending some time in thought and prayer around this question?



When we consider our mission as disciples of Christ and our mission as a church, I think these types of questions are worthy of our time and consideration. In Matthew 25, in what is one of the most personally challenging passages in the Bible for me, we find Jesus speaking about what the day of judgment will be like. It is a relevant passage to wrestle with a bit as we consider our possible answers to this question.

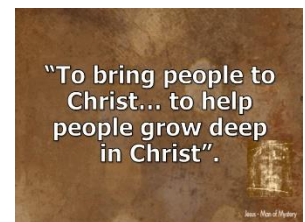
In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus explains what the criteria will be for eternal life in the kingdom of God. Jesus says that those who gave water to the thirsty, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the widow and orphans, and cared for the sick will be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Yes, at times we all meet the call to do these things. But Jesus is not talking about occasional obedience here. It is a constant call that we are to always respond to. And therein lies the challenge. It makes the answer to this question a much different thing to consider, doesn't it?



Jesus said to Andrew and Peter, "*Follow me and I will make you fish for people*". Answering the call to meet people's

basic needs as best we can whenever we can is one way we continue to fish for people today. When we meet needs, we are fishing. We are putting the lure out there to gain the opportunity to begin to share the 'why' of why we are meeting someone's needs – we love and serve others because Jesus first loved us. It is a love that can and will change people's lives.

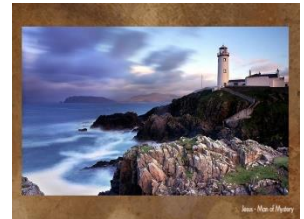
Yes, I know it is a challenge and I know it is not simple. It is difficult for us and for our church to correctly discern who and what and where and how to love and serve others. Yet ultimately, this mission statement remains the call for our church: "To bring people to Christ... to help people grow deep in Christ". To accomplish this mission, we must first begin by establishing relationships with those who do not know Christ. We can do this any number of ways. It can be by bringing or



serving a meal. It can be through a wedding, baptism, or funeral. It can be by bringing a friend to church with us. Once we have a relationship established then we will find opportunities to share our faith and to talk about our faith with others so that we can bring them to Christ. No matter how we 'fish', it all begins with building relationships.

As we consider the mission, I want to also share a story. This is not intended to be an excuse for not engaging in the mission but to point out that we must remain focused on the mission. Again, the mission for us as individuals and for us as a church is to make disciples and to help them grow deeper in Christ.

"There is an old story about a lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline. Once a month he would receive a new supply of oil to keep the light burning so that ships could safely sail near the rocky coast. One night, though, a woman from a nearby village came and begged him for some oil to keep her family warm. Another time a father asked for some to use in his lamp. Another man needed some oil to lubricate a wheel. Since all the requests seemed legitimate, the lighthouse keeper tried to please everyone and granted the requests of all.

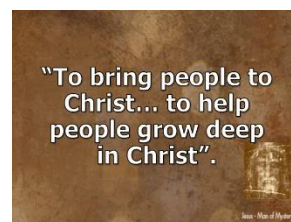


Toward the end of the month, he noticed his supply of oil was dangerously low. Soon it was gone, and one night the light on the lighthouse went out. As a result, that evening several ships were wrecked and countless lives were lost. When the authorities investigated, the man was very apologetic. He told them he

was just trying to be helpful with the oil. Their reply to his excuses, however, was simple and to the point: "You were given oil for one purpose, and one purpose only - to keep that light burning!"

A church faces a similar commission. There is no end to the demands placed on a church's time and resources. As a result, the foundational purposes of a church must remain supreme."

Our foundational purpose is right here before us. It must remain our sole focus. As we seek to be a church that works out our mission, I invite you to become part of the conversation and to be part of the mission. Where is God calling you to go fishing? Where is there a sense of urgent mission in your life? How are you feeling led to live out the gospel imperative to bring others to Christ? This week and in the weeks ahead, I encourage you to be in prayer and to dedicate time to discernment around your mission as a disciple of Christ. The door is open, the email also works great – so don't be shy. Let us pray.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What aspects of your faith must grow for you to respond to the call to be in mission for the Lord?
- 2) Where is God leading or calling you? Spend some time in prayer this week.
- 3) How can you easily get involved in ministry to connect others to faith or to meet a need that is in our community or area? Go and serve!