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Mark 1:14-20

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One of the sites we visit during my trip to Palestine and Israel is Kibbutz Ginosar, where the so-called "Jesus Boat" is housed. It was discovered near Migdal, the home of Mary Magdalene, on the northwest shores of the Sea of Galilee in 1986 by two Israeli fishermen brothers during a period of drought when the Sea had receded. The boat is an extraordinary first-of-its-kind find, 27 feet long by 7 ½ feet wide, composed of ten different kinds of wood. It originally had a sail, places for four oarsmen, a tillerman, could accommodate a cargo of about a ton, and hold up to a dozen people for trips across the lake. Carbon-dating, and nails, coins, and pottery shards found in the boat date it to the time of Jesus. It's likely, archaeologists suggest, the boat would have been used for a century or more before it was scrapped.

My groups have visited the "Jesus Boat" more than a dozen times (Ron, Jane, Anita), and each time I think of today's Gospel story. Walking along the shore of the lake, he comes across some fishermen – was he searching for them specifically or did he just happen upon them, we'll never know if it was by design or by chance. And of all the things he could say to greet them, he says, "Follow," and stranger still, they drop everything – boats, nets, father, friends, leave it all behind – and they follow. In fact, Mark says, they follow "immediately."

Was it his charisma, an urgency in his voice; or had they been waiting for someone to stir them to take that brave first step they'd always been unconsciously wanting to take, but never had a reason, never met the right person; something deeper than livelihood, social position, or familial bonds?

I've heard scores of sermons on this text focused on the church's evangelizing mission, finding the right Gospel 'bait' to convert the unsaved. But this focuses on the wrong thing. Yes, it's clear Jesus' first followers were fishermen, but it was a trade at the time was undergoing a makeover. The fishing trade had been nationalized by Rome in Palestine, administered by Jewish puppet kings, who held onto power through excessive taxation, a cut off the top for Herod before it was sent to Rome, a double oppression, a national monopoly where fishermen worked per diem or as contract workers. The entire industry, as well as each village's fishermen's guild, would have been highly regulated, heavily taxed, with even their commercial licenses purchased from the state.

Before Rome, fishing was a respectable 'blue-collar' job, providing one of the principal foods in the diet, but with Rome, the excessive taxes, tributes, and fees imposed by the empire were a burden to the fishermen and their families, and so decreased their buying power as well as their social status. By Jesus' time, there was a very real disparity between the wealthy upper Jewish classes, collaborators with Rome, and trades like fishermen who were despised by the rich and powerful. A kinship economy was replaced by a state-controlled political economy.

What boats are you ready to rock? This isn't hypothetical, academic. I'm asking, What truth are you ready to speak? What powers are you ready to confront? What trouble are you ready to make?

It's no wonder that Jesus' message resonated with fishermen and their families, as well as an entire agrarian and fishing-based Galilee. They were ripe for Jesus' radical re-ordering of their political, social, and economic relationships. So when he elevates the role of fishermen, he gives all those who occupied the lowest rungs of the social ladder a dignity they had lost, a dignity not only of vocation but a dignity of person. And when he doubles down that fishing is what his kingdom is all about, that his mission is fishin', he knew it would not only make him suspect among the wealthy and well-connected, even Herod, but he'd be a danger, too, to their elite social position and power. "Follow and you'll fish for people," he said, and with that he was preaching sedition, preaching revolution, the overthrow of an entire political, social, and economic hierarchy. We usually miss that part of the story.

Back to Jesus and the fishermen on the shore. The shore's a boundary between sea and land, the water's depth and land's solid footing, an edge, a transition, a brink. "Follow," he says, "it's time"; and immediately they follow. They'd been busy living their lives, but when he came, it was like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, their eyes were opened, as if their entire lives had been preparing them for this encounter with him. No spreadsheet, no lists of positives, negatives; no meetings, they didn't even pray about it. They followed "immediately." Have you ever taken such a leap of faith, stepped out of a comfortable known into a future unknown; you just knew you needed to do it; it was important, right, something of God? "It's time." We're all on a shore, between yesterday and today; upon what shore are you waiting today? What grand feat, what simple gesture are you waiting to perform? Why are you waiting?

"Yeah, it's time." Especially in these dark days, where daily raging can make you weary – who could blame us for being on the brink of overwhelmed and losing hope. Jesus comes, looks us in the eye, it's personal for him, personal for us, his voice, ever gentle, ever strong – can you hear it? – beckons, invites, nudges you forward not backward. It's just you and him. And it's time.

NAMES ... no matter your age, your situation or your station in life, he calls you by name. "It's time ... The party's ready ... The kingdom's come ... I can't do it without you ... Follow!"

We hosted a program this past Thursday, "*Race and Religion in Donald Trump's America: One Year In.*" I spoke, along with the president of an organization serving immigrants and refugees and an African-American preacher, two prominent activists in town. But it's what happened after

John Beams and I got a chance to catch up a little. I hadn't seen John in awhile; he's one of the gentlest souls I've ever met. He told me he just turned 70, recently retired, one of the founders of Fort Wayne's *Center for Non-Violence* more than 30 years ago, dealing with issues of violence with women, children, and in families. He referred to himself as "naturally a skeptic but deeply moved by Spirit." I told him "I get that." Anyway, I knew he had been participating in four-day sweats for the last few years as part of his spiritual practice, but now he'd been authorized by a Native American Cree elder friend to hold his own sweats, so he we discussed for awhile the benefits of the spiritual and physical fasting of the sweat.

John turned to walk away, then turned back again, and said,

"You know, Mike, this is what I appreciate most about the sweat. It's so bodily. For most religious people, even progressives, their spirituality happens from the neck up." He continued, "I find myself connecting to each of the world's faiths at the level of the heart."

"Yes, John, I know, but even the heart's not enough for me anymore. Like you I'm drawn to the body, to incarnation, but for me it's the guts. The passion in my heart becomes courage in my guts which moves me to act for justice.

He nodded – the head, the heart, the gut together. The head and heart without the gut is passionless. The head and gut without the heart is compassionless. And the heart and gut without the head doesn't have a plan.

I asked John, "Your whole life has been spent working with abusers and abused, with children and bullying, and all forms of violence. One thing I struggle with, 'How do I come to my activism motivated not from a place of rage or hate, but from compassion and a spirit of positive change? I know a constant state of anger is unhealthy for me and in the end, not sustainable. I really struggle with this."

He said, "We all struggle. Anger is necessary, it motivates me, but I also need a strong personal Center, that's where anger is channeled into compassion, where the other is humanized. I need my Center.

We talked abit more, but you get the gist of it. Where, What, Who will we find at your Center, where the still, small voice gently whispers, "It's time! Follow"; your Center, where you follow immediately?

Martin Luther King's Nobel Prize lecture, "*The Quest for Peace and Justice*" is as relevant today as it was in 1964:

Here and there an individual or group dares to love, and rise to the majestic heights of moral maturity. In a very real sense this is a great time to be alive. So I'm not yet discouraged about the future.

Granted ... the easygoing optimism of yesterday is impossible.

Granted ... the pioneers of the struggle for peace and freedom will still be battered by storms of persecution, the nagging feeling they can no longer bear such a heavy burden, the temptation to retreat to a more quiet and serene life.

Granted ... we face a world crisis which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea.

But, my friends, every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom.

And in such a dark and confused world such as this, the kingdom of God may yet reign in people's hearts.

It's time, my friends. It's time to follow!

SOJOURNERS

What commitments convince us that they are worth living for?

After John was “delivered up” to death (*paradothēnai*) → Jesus begins his ministry

Same word Mark and Paul (Romans, I Corinthians) uses for Jesus

The destiny of John and Jesus are linked together

[1] The time is fulfilled, [2] the kingdom of God has come near; [3] repent, [4] believe in the good news.

Isaiah 60.22-61.3a

The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation;

I am the LORD; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;

he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

Announcing that God's reign is near has the consequence of an urgent call for repentance, that is, aligning one's values and way of life with God's ways.

The time is fulfilled, immediately (*kay euthys*), the kingdom is *eggizken* (right around the corner)

Gift (good news) and Demand (repent)

Good news appears three times in the first 15 verses of Mark

Philip and Nathaniel, now Simon, Andrew, James, and John

What was it about the encounter, about Jesus, that caused them to leave everything immediately? No idea where it would lead.

Jesus and the disciples were “northerners”; the religious center was Jerusalem in the south → The religious leaders in Jerusalem naturally considered Jesus an “outsider.”

Sea of Galilee, 12 miles long, 8 miles wide. Harp-shaped, aka *Chinnereth*, Hebrew for harp

Roman imperial exploitation. Families lost their land. Children scattered in search of work, traditional family and village structures crumbled under enormous cultural and economic stress. A few people amassed incredible levels of wealth in Jesus' day, while countless others found themselves destitute.

Fisherman – taxes, tributes, fishing guilds

“believe in” (*pisteuo en*) – nowhere else in Mark, once in John, nowhere else in Greek literature or papyri

Bethsaida, Migdal (“tower” Greek → Tarichaeae “processed fish-ville”

14 C.E., Caesar Augustus died, succeeded by Tiberius. To curry the new emperor's favor, Herod Antipas (the client-king Tetrarch of Galilee) began building a new capital city called Tiberias on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Antipas hoped to demonstrate that he was the best candidate to intensify Romanization of the region by establishing Tiberias as a thoroughly Hellenized administrative and military center. The primary function of this city was to regulate the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee, putting it firmly under the control of Roman interests. There Antipas built a royal palace, where it is likely he beheaded John the Baptist (Mk 6:7ff).

The construction work at Tiberias may have drawn Jesus, as a carpenter/construction worker, to the Sea from Nazareth, and as an itinerant laborer he might have moved up the coast from harbor to harbor.

This explains how Jesus appears in Capernaum, a major harbor, important center of the fishing trade.

“they left their nets” (Gk *aphiemi*) is used in Mark to connote release from debt, as well as forgiveness of sin and liberation from bondage. It is, in other words, a “Jubilee” verb. In fact, an epilogue to the later call of the rich man story defines “leaving” home, family and work specifically in terms of the discipleship community's practice of social and economic redistribution (Mk 10:28f).

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