

Come Follow, Go Fish

Mark 1:16-20

Two fishermen are out in their boat one Sunday morning when they heard the church bells ring in the distance. One of the men said to the other, "You know we really ought to be in church." The second man replied, "Yes, but I couldn't have gone anyway, the wife is sick in bed."

I'm not much of a fisherman myself. I like to fish, and I especially like to eat the fish I catch. Today in our study of Mark we find four fishermen who will become fishers for men.

Now last week, if you were with us in the morning, we looked at Mark 1:14-15 at the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry. We saw that the Lord Jesus came preaching the Gospel of God, and we outlined the content of that Good News: repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and His saving message.

Next Mark records for us Jesus calling His first disciples, and their response to His call in to verses 16-20:

16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets.

20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

Now let me say: all of us, as believers in the Lord Jesus, are called; and we are called not only to be saved, we are called to serve. We will see this morning that we are called to be His disciples. There are many lessons that we're going to learn from Christ's call and from the disciples' response. Let us look first of all at Christ's call - what can we learn from Christ's call?

1. Christ's Call (Mark 1:16-17)

A. A Gracious Call.

The first thing I want you to see is that it was a gracious call. Mark says in verse 16 **"And as He walked by the sea of Galilee."** It was there that Jesus saw them and called to them. Jesus came to where they were. He came to them, they did not essentially come to Christ, but He came to them and where they were.

Now the gospel of John tells us that Andrew and Simon had met the Lord Jesus already a few months ago, and in fact they started following Him then at the very outset of His ministry. It was at the baptism of the Lord Jesus by John the Baptist, when He was declared to be the Son of God not only by John's witness of him, but by the Dove coming down, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and by the declaration of the Father from heaven. At that baptism John said: 'Behold

the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world', and these two brothers, Peter and Andrew, followed the Lord Jesus.

But here in Mark we find them a few months later back at their jobs, fishing. Simon and Andrew were working as fishermen on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, in other places in the Bible it's called Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberius. It was an inland sea about 12 miles long, 6 miles wide at its widest point. James and John were also at the lake mending their nets in the fishing boat.

The men who Jesus called to be his disciples were just ordinary people. If we think about what these men will be called upon to do, it is astonishing that Jesus chose these men. They were not influential leaders or political power brokers, they were simple fishermen. They were not educated men, they had much to learn from Jesus. Perhaps even more important they had much to unlearn. They were exceedingly narrow minded and were full of Jewish prejudices and misconceptions. They were just men, a mixture of good and bad, of grace and the old sin nature, of spiritual insight and immaturity. They were not the aristocrats or theologians but ordinary men. God delights to use ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Abraham Lincoln is purported to have said, "God must love the common people He made so many of them."

Now Jesus comes to these fishermen where they are, working as fishermen on the sea, and He graciously calls them to follow Him. Christ comes to them where they are, in the midst of their daily occupation, and calls them - not only to salvation, but to service. He's calling them to be disciples!

Let me say: it is a mistake for all of us not to apply these verses of the Bible to our lives. While there is a distinct call to serve as an apostle, or a distinct call to serve as a pastor, an elder, a teacher, an evangelist, or a missionary - because those are gifts from God that only He can give - I believe there is no such distinction in Scripture between the call to be saved and the call to serve. You cannot split that one call in two. The call to be saved is the call to serve. The call to be saved is the call to discipleship.

And that call is a not only a gracious call because Jesus meets us where we are, it is also,

B. A Demanding Call, "Follow Me!"

The call is "**Follow Me.**" Someone has said that that has the sense of a military command, sharp: 'Follow me!'. Jesus said "follow me" – they were called By Christ and To Christ. They were not called to a cause - it was not "follow my political agenda." They were not called to a doctrine - it was not "follow my ideas." They were not called to a religion -it was not just "follow my example." They were called to a person - it was "follow me." It is a call to allegiance to a person. When Jesus calls people He always calls them to a relationship, not just to a religion. He calls them to Himself. The call to discipleship is the call to follow Christ. I wonder has Christ come to you, asking you to follow Him?

Now some people today think that you can be a Christian without being a disciple. I believe the New Testament knows nothing of that. Jesus called people to follow Him. To follow Him is to be with Him. It is to go where He goes and do what He does. It is not only to be saved, it is to serve, it is to continually, constantly in your life to go after Jesus, wherever He leads.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and teacher who opposed Hitler in the Second World War, and because of his opposition on April 9, 1945 - a month before the Germans surrendered - he was hanged. Before the war in 1937 he wrote a book entitled 'The Cost of Discipleship'. It was a call to a more faithful and radical obedience to Christ, and it was a severe rebuke of comfortable Christianity - much of which, in Germany, was willing to tolerate or even comply with Adolf Hitler. This is what he said in this book 'The Cost of Discipleship': "Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance. It is baptism without church discipline. It is communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate. The call of Christ on our lives, if we are Christians, is demanding. It is the call to be a disciple. It is the call to follow."

Are you following? I'm not asking 'Did you ask Jesus into your heart?'. I'm not asking 'Did you sign a decision card, stick your hand in the air, walk the aisle, or pray the sinner's prayer?'. Jesus' message was to repent and believe, that is how we are saved. Jesus' call was to turn from our sin, to place our faith in Him, and follow Him. His call is to discipleship - that's demanding.

The call to discipleship ought to shatter our comfortable world of middle-class discipleship, we are not called to be onlookers, or pew-warmers, we are not called to give ourselves casually or occasionally, but rather His call is to lifelong process of transformation. Not all of us may be called to sell everything and live in poverty but we are follow Him all the time. That does not mean that everyone is called to leave their present job and enter full time ministry or be career missionaries. But it does mean that our whole life is all about following Jesus.

Thirdly, His call not only was gracious and demanding, it was,

C. An Equipping Call, "I will make you become fishers of men."

Verse seventeen says, "**Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.**" Jesus literally declares, "I will cause you to become fishers of men."

Jesus looked beyond what they were to what they would become. The important principle at work here is that those whom Christ has called He enables and empowers to perform the task to which they have been assigned. Jesus did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men but he promised to make them fisherman after men's souls.

Someone said, "God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called." Christ calls us as disciples, yes it is a demanding call, but it is an equipping call. He doesn't leave us to our own devices to do His work, but He gives us everything we need because Christ makes fishers of men.

Christ makes fishers of men, and Christ can make us fishers of men if we follow Him! The more we follow Him, the more we will become like Him, the more successful we will be in winning others to Him. Our responsibility is to follow Him, His responsibility is to take care of the rest and make us fishers of men. Perhaps the reason why there is such lack of fruit in my life and yours is because we are following afar off. We don't just have a fishing problem, we have a following problem.

He equips, He trains, but at the end of the day we must fish. To be great at fishing you have to fish.

Now here are some similarities between fishing and soul-winning. One: both require patience. They involve lonely hours, at times, waiting. If you're going to win men it's not going to happen overnight at times, there's got to be a lot of work, groundwork, loving, praying, spending, toiling, preaching - patience. Second: skill is also needed. You need to use baits, lure, you need to have nets that are effective in your fishing. Skilful fishermen will grow to learn the parts of a lake or a river where the fish go most. Are we going where the fish are? Did you ever hear of a fishing boat that opened up its doors for all the fish to come in, so that they could catch them? No. They go out into the ocean, risking their very lives, to catch a great crop of them.

Christ's call is gracious, He comes to us where we are. It is demanding: 'Come follow Me'. It is equipping: 'I will make you fishers of men' - but at the end of the day, we need to fish.

Lastly let's look at the response of the disciples to Christ's call, and we can learn from it too.

2. The Disciple's Response (Mark 1:1-20).

A. It was Immediate.

Mark says: "**They immediately left their nets and followed Him.**" They forsook their nets and followed Him. Christ came with a radical message, and then a radical call, and these four responded in radical obedience. I wish my obedience was instant - theirs was.

B. It was Absolute.

Simon and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their nets and their father. So compelling was the call and claim of Christ upon their life, that all prior claims, interests, lost their validity. Picture the scene now, and the impact of it to those men and their families and those around in the village. This little boat is pulled up on the shore of that tranquil lake, and these two strapping brothers, fishers since they were knee-high to their father, leave their aged grey-haired father and step out of the boat; leave their hired servants; leave what was probably a lucrative family business - and they follow Jesus along the shore! They have a new occupation: not catching fish, catching men! Not mending nets, but mending broken lives!

I want to ask you this morning: is Christ calling you? Is He calling you to leave all that you have previously known in order to serve Him? As you see from Simon, Andrew, James and John, the cost meant a loss of livelihood, loss of family relationships, loss of general reputation in the community. Christ is still calling men and women on the same terms today: to forsake all and to follow Him! In Luke 14:33 Jesus says, "... **whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.**" Christ's call still demands an instant and an absolute response.

Thirdly, in the disciples' response we see it was instant, absolute, but also life-changing.

C. It Life-Changing.

The horizon of these fishermen's lives had been bound by the shores of Galilee. They knew little more than the deck of their boat, the currents of the lake, and the handful of people in the marketplace. Their conversation consisted of trade talk,

local gossip, family affairs, Galilean politics. In a word, they were remarkably provincial, even to the extent of having their own tell-tale accent. Then Christ came, and how their world changed: in place of Galilee came the world. John, here, this John, was to become the Bishop of Ephesus! Peter went to Rome, Andrew went as far as Russia! Their hearts were enlarged to take in the whole world! Their minds, once circumscribed and committed to the smallest interests, would overflow with the deep thoughts - all because they followed Jesus.

Someone has well said: 'What every man needs is something in which he can invest his life'. Let us be under no illusion: the Christian is called by Christ to invest his life in discipleship, and discipleship means following, and following means fishing. Don't call yourself a Christian if you're not following - I don't care what you've done, what you've prayed, what you've said! A Christian follows, and a Christian will fish, for He has called us to a task - and in that task those first four disciples and the rest after them spent themselves, burned themselves up, and in the end died fishing for men!

I'm thankful for the simple invitation of Jesus. Think of how it worked out in the lives of those first disciples. When Jesus met them on the shores of Galilee, they were simply uneducated fishermen who were slowly growing in their awareness of who the Lord Jesus really was. We read of their mistakes and missteps throughout the Gospel accounts. But by the time we get to the book of Acts, these same men were turning the world upside down.

Acts 4 describes how the apostles bravely preached the Gospel before the hostile Jewish ruling council and how in verse twelve Peter proclaimed, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved:" And the very next verse, Acts 4:13, gives the response of the audience: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

They followed Jesus as best they could; and Jesus kept His promise to make them fishers of men. That's the pattern for all of us who are Christians. First we are followers, and then He makes us fishers. The invitation still stands, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."