

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/21/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Third Sunday After the Epiphany**

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>

**Mark 1:14-20**

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### Follow me!

This week's lection from Mark's Gospel includes the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the call of His first disciples. Mark identifies the arrest of John the Baptist as the precipitating event that launches Jesus' ministry. After beginning to proclaim the good news, the next event in His ministry is the call of His first disciples. The account in Mark is with his customary brevity. Jesus approaches His would-be disciples. He calls them. They immediately follow. The themes emerging through this Scripture have direct relevance to our call to discipleship and our subsequent discipleship journey.

#### Mark 1:14-20 Commentary

*<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Jesus' public ministry begins after John the Baptist was arrested. This reinforces the fact that John was the forerunner and had completed his God-assigned mission before Jesus began His. There is also a sense of continuity between John and Jesus' ministry (see v.4). All subsequent references to preaching or proclamation in the Gospel of Mark refer to these two verses which express the nature of Jesus' preaching. First, unlike John who had the people make a special journey to come out into the wilderness to listen to him, Jesus goes to the people and lives among them. Two radically different approaches to ministry. The reference to the Gospel, (*euangelion*) has already been explained in vv. 2-13). Verse 15 indicates that Jesus is not just another messenger like John proclaiming the Good New, Jesus IS the Good News. The era of divine rule of peace and salvation – God's Kingdom – is at hand. The message is to repent (to have a change of heart) and believe in (put one's trust in) the Gospel.

*<sup>16</sup> Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

The first action of Jesus' ministry after beginning His preaching is to call His first disciples. While frustratingly brief and lacking in detail, Mark's account of Jesus calling His disciples reveals some key themes. The custom of the day (and to some extent today) was for the potential disciple to first decide upon which rabbi to follow. Great care

had to be taken before accepting the “yoke of the rabbi” since the interpretive approach of God’s Word by the rabbi would be forever binding on the disciple. The rabbi too had much at stake in this process since he would not want to waste time on anyone who could not measure up and one day emulate the master. The selection process often involved much testing. In complete contrast, Jesus approaches and calls His disciples rather than the other way around. There is no testing involved or any theological argument – the call is simply, “*Follow me.*” The men He called were not promising young students but typical tradesmen. It is also apparent that the men Jesus called knew each other. There were two sets of brothers working in the same profession in the same immediate proximity. In Luke’s account James and John were partners of Peter (Luke 5:10). The men were called while they were at work, perhaps when they least expected it. The men were also given a task – to become “*fishers of men.*” The response of Jesus’ disciples was also clear – they left their old life behind and followed.

### Reflection and Action

While Mark’s account communicates the key themes of how Jesus called His disciples, a systematic study of all the Gospel accounts reveals something that is perhaps only implied in Mark’s account. In John’s account, Andrew, and his brother Peter, encounter Jesus before He travels to Galilee (John 1:35-42). It also reveals that at least Andrew was already a disciple of John the Baptist. They were following Jesus before John was arrested. It is also helpful to understand that in the culture of the day, while some people were “full-time” disciples, it was possible to be a disciple of a rabbi without necessarily giving up one’s occupation. This appears to be the case with Andrew, Peter, James, and John. Luke’s account of the Jesus calling His first disciples (Luke 5:1-11) involves Jesus asking to borrow Peter’s boat to be put out from the shore so he could teach the crowds. After he was finished, Jesus convinces Peter to let down his nets again, despite a fruitless night’s fishing. What results is a miraculous catch of fish which requires the others with Peter to help land it. When the others had witnessed the catch, Jesus encourages them to not be afraid and states, “*...from now on you will be catching men*” (Luke 5:10). The addition of “*from now on*” suggests this was a call to full-time discipleship. If not immediately clear from Mark’s account alone, the call to discipleship is thus more of a process than a one-time all-or-nothing event.

The idea of discipleship as a process thus encourages us to consider our call to discipleship as an ongoing journey into a deeper relationship with Christ and the resulting life changes that follow. The “follow me” call is thus something we are presented with every single day. Perhaps the noise of the world drowns it out, but it is still there if we take the time to listen. The decision to follow is always ours. On any given day, whether we choose to follow farther along the journey or remain in the boat is a decision we consciously make. Discipleship is thus a choice.

