

“My, People Come and Go So Quickly Here”

How many of us have seen “The Wizard of Oz?” Were any of you frightened by the flying monkeys or the Wicked Witch of the West? The Witch of the West was supposed to have more screen time in the movie, but she scared the kids so much in the preview audiences that they had to edit her out of some scenes. One of my favorite scenes and lines from the movie comes from when Glenda, the Good Witch, disappears as quickly as she enters. Dorothy exclaims, “My, people come and go so quickly here.” All of a sudden she is gone and Dorothy and Toto are exhorted to “follow the Yellowbrick Road.” And in no short order, she and Toto were off to do just that.

In the past two weeks, have you noticed how quickly things happen in Mark’s Gospel? Thus far, just in Chapter 1, we meet John the Baptist, John baptizes Jesus, Jesus goes into the desert for 40 days, John is somehow in prison, Jesus begins his ministry, and calls his first followers who simply left their father, Zebedee, in his fishing boat with his hired hands. More about Zebedee later. Now, mind you, this is just the first 20 verses of the first chapter. People do come and go so quickly in the first 20 verses!!

For the current cycle in the Lectionary, we will spend a great deal of time reading from the Gospel of Mark. Here is a review of what we think we know about Mark’s Gospel. First of all, scripture scholars believe it was the first of the

Gospels to be written. They put a date of 60 AD to when it was finally written down. Like the rest of the Scriptures, it had been passed down by word of mouth whenever early followers of “The Way” and later called Christians gathered. The ones who hear Mark’s Gospel were early Christians being persecuted in Rome.

They were in prison, waiting to be literally fed to the lions in the Coliseum, because they would not recant their profession of faith. The overall arching theme of the Gospel is the Suffering Christ. They equated their sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus. However, they knew that Jesus rose from the dead and they would as well. They are told that they will arise and experience new life with Christ. So, this Gospel is short, to the point, and filled with what these folks needed to hear about Jesus and his teachings. There were no birth stories, mangers, shepherds, angels, etc. here. There weren’t many explanations, either, just people coming and going, leaving their boats and their work to follow Jesus.

James and John left their boats AND left their father Zebedee with his hired hands. For the past week or so, I have been left to wonder what exactly Zebedee was thinking when he saw his sons go off with the carpenter’s son. It wasn’t as if they didn’t know him. There are some scholars who think that James and John may have been cousins of Jesus as some traditions have their mother, Salome, as Mary’s sister. Regardless, do you think it that Zebedee might have been a bit upset with his sons for taking off and leaving him with his workers?

If Mark had a bit more time, I am sure there would have been some interesting dialogue between Zebedee, James, John, and Jesus. Subsequently, others were called and left their families to follow Jesus. One can only surmise that they returned to the families to make sure that they were provided for, etc. It makes no sense to me that they would simply up and leave without making some provisions for those with whom you have responsibility. Most of the time, even ministers get to plan and give their families some notice.

Much like the sons of Zebedee, we, too are called to follow Jesus and be made “fishers of people.” Are we really expected to leave our boat behind with no one to even hold our part of the net? I don’t think that is the case. However, we are still called to be followers. We are called to be “fishers of people” inasmuch that we are able to invite and bring people into our church. We are called to follow and assist with the delivery of the gospel message to the greater Westfield/Southwick area. Some of us can do a little more than others or, if not more, at least at different times. People who work during the day can volunteer in the evenings or on a weekend day. People who are not working or are retired can help with feeding those in need on Mondays at 11:45 at First Congregational Church or at the Community Table/Soup Kitchen on the fourth Tuesday. Others can take part in the food pantry in Southwick. Another ministry of course is the thrift shop—we have them in both churches. One of the things I have learned while

-serving the two churches over the past two years is that people do tend to do things quietly and without any fanfare.

We may have more time than the first hearers of Mark's Gospel. We have space in our lives for reflection and the opportunity to learn more about the story. People do seem to come and go in both churches, but that is part of the circle of life. Let us take some time this week to reflect on our call to be followers and to become "fishers of people."