

Starting from Home

Mark 1:29-39

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Home is where one starts from.

- T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

Princeton Seminary professor Kenda Creasy Dean says, “Christianity has always been more of a trust-walk than a belief system. In Christian tradition, faith depends on who we follow, and that depends on who we love.” She goes on, “Believing in a person, having utter confidence in someone – creates a very different set of expectations than believing in ‘beliefs’” (*Almost Christian*, p. 7).

Well, brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John believed in this person Jesus of Nazareth who came walking along the shore one day after they were finishing up fishing. Jesus said to them, “Drop your nets and follow me.” And they did just that.

Perhaps it had something to do with the look in his eyes when he called them. Perhaps it had something to do with what they felt in their hearts. Perhaps it had something to do with what they had heard about Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist. And perhaps it had something to do with the fact that they were all young and eager and ready. Scholars believe that Simon was likely the oldest and was but in his early to mid-twenties. John was the youngest, perhaps no more than fourteen. Most likely it had to do with the mystery of God’s grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. But for whatever reasons, here was this liminal, watershed

moment. They could have said, “No, not today,” or “No, I can’t I’m too busy.” But they didn’t; instead, they followed.

They didn’t believe in “beliefs.” In fact, they probably did not know much of what Jesus believed. But they trusted him. And they followed him. The only way they were going to learn what Jesus believed was by following him, by participating with him in his mission and service.

So off they went. Off to make a difference. Off to be changed, off to never being the same again. Off to change the world, and the first place Jesus led them ... was back home.

He leads them right back to their hometown of Capernaum. Maybe they thought Jesus was going to lead them to Jerusalem and to the Temple, or to Caesarea, the seat of Roman power? Maybe up to Phoenicia and the city of Sidon, exotic and multicultural? Or out into the desert to retreat and meditate on deep thoughts? Instead, they go back to same old Capernaum – “Capa-nowhere” as they derisively called it. Booring! Same old dusty streets and same old dusty people with their same old dusty views.

They get to hometown Capernaum and Jesus leads them to their home church, the synagogue. Ugh! You could hear the congregation outside singing the same old dusty hymns. James and John could hear their cousin singing off-key as usual, and there was Andrew and Simon’s uncle passing out Orders of Worship at the door just like he had done for thirty years. And with the same old patronizing tone in his voice, “Well, well look who showed up in church, today?”

But after that, it was not the same-old, same-old. Jesus shook things up! He started teaching and soon the powers-that-be confronted him. They said Jesus was preaching about serving poor people, which sounded suspiciously like social justice, and he preached on sharing our lives and helping our neighbors, which sounded like socialism. They wanted to know where he got such extremist views! Jesus said he got it from the Bible. Well, they didn't like that, so they told him to leave. Instead, Jesus called them out and confronted them. He exorcised them of a demon. It was dramatic! "Wow!" John said excitedly, "I've never seen anything like that before!" And Simon said, "I'm ten years older than you and I've never even heard of anything like that!" Jesus coming to church that day changed the whole church. Revival broke out. Hearts were broken and opened to God and to one another. People who had been enemies for forty years, hugged each other and asked for forgiveness. It was something. It was just the beginning.

Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John were fired up. This was exciting! This was the work of God! Now where would Jesus lead them? God's kingdom is happening! And Jesus walked out the front door of church and walked right down to – to Simon and Andrew's home!

Simon is hurriedly whispering to Andrew, "I knew we should have cleaned up last night and this morning! Did you vacuum? We left beer cans on the coffee table in front of the TV that I told you to pick up!" Andrew whispered back, "Well, your clothes are all over the floor and draped over exercise bike!" Simon slapped his own forehead as he remembered, "Oh my, mother-in-law is home today. She's sick in bed and does not need a bunch of noise and people in the house!"

They get home and start making apologies for the mess and mention that Simon's mother-in-law is sick in bed. Jesus says, "Take me to her." When he gets to her, Jesus puts his hand on her forehead and says, "She's running a fever." Jesus sits on the chair beside the bed and pats her hand for a bit and talks to her and soon she nods her head. Then Jesus stands up and takes her by the hand, and she stands up! The fever is gone! She feels great." And Mark said she "served them." I wonder, maybe she served because she was grateful? The deep and sustaining source of service is gratitude. We serve others because we are grateful God in Christ has served us and others who are followers of this Christ have served us.

Let me hasten to add that the word Mark uses for "serve" is the word for "deacon," which does not necessarily mean she got up and fixed dinner for everyone. Mark uses this word only three times in his Gospel. Here, and then in chapter 10 (verse 45), where Jesus said he "came not be served but to serve." And finally, Mark uses it toward the end when he says the women "followed him and served him" (15:41). Here, at the outset, and at the conclusion, women are identified as true disciples – they serve. Rather than ignore them or demean them, Jesus holds them up as the role-models.

My guess is that Simon and Andrew were embarrassed when Jesus walked into their own home. It was messy, "Now, Jesus, over here is the guest room, where you'll be staying, and over there is a storage room that we always keep shut..." before Andrew could finish his sentence warning Jesus that some parts of the home are off-limits to him, Jesus was opening the door to a room that was messy, junky, and dirty. It was a secret. How embarrassing. How intimate.

And this is the gospel. Part of our calling as disciples is having Jesus into the intimacy of our homes, where we are truly known. No pretense, no posturing, no wearing of masks. Intimate. Our secrets are revealed. Our secret fears and anxieties, our dark anger and hatreds all hidden away in secret. And Jesus opens the door and walks into the room letting in light and healing, repentance and change. Coming to our homes is also where we are ordinary. Where the meals are cooked, dishes washed, trash taken out, and clothes washed. Where we laugh and argue and cry and talk. From where we rush to work and where we return each evening to rest.

Simon and Andrew, James and John have just been called to a new life in Christ, and then Jesus leads them straight home. Out there on the shore where he called them was a high and holy moment. And when Jesus confronted the demon possessed man in church was exciting and liberating, but unless our holy moments and life as disciples comes home, our new life in Christ will evaporate.

Martin Luther, the great reformer in the sixteenth century, believed that Christian formation and discipleship training started at home. He believed that families needed to learn the core teachings of the church together, beginning at home. The National Study of Youth and Religion done in the twenty-first century said that there was a direct correspondence between the strength or weakness of the faith of young people with the strength or weakness of the faith of their parents. In other words, children and youth may get a lot of information at church, but they learn what's real at home. And if God is real at home, God will be real to children and youth the rest the week, wherever they go. If it is natural to talk about God and if Christian practices like prayer are naturally done, and parents treat each other with love and mutual respect like Christians, kids pick up on it. It is at home where

we learn whom we love and whom we trust and if we love and trust God at home, children and young people will notice (see *Almost Christian*, p. 110-112).

Did you know you can visit this very home where Simon's mother-in-law was healed in Capernaum today? Although in archaeology there is no sure thing, based upon pretty substantial evidence it is very likely that the first century house discovered in Capernaum and excavated, is the same house talked about here in Mark 1. We know there was Christian graffiti and wall markings saying things like, "Jesus have mercy," and "Jesus is Lord," and signs of the cross, dating back to just a few years after the death of Jesus. We know the house was soon plastered and upgraded soon thereafter, highly unusual for a house that was only a residence, and then the central room was expanded. All suggesting that his home became a central meeting place of worship for some of the earliest Christians.

Three hundred years later, a Byzantine church was built over this house. Eventually, all was forgotten, and Capernaum become deserted and dried up and covered over. In the mid-1800's Capernaum was rediscovered and only after WWII was this house, known as Simon Peter's home, discovered. In 1990, a very modern Roman Catholic church was built on pillars over the site with a glass floor through which people can look down into the original home.

One of the oldest and most holy sites of all Christianity is a home.

It is interesting that we have this story this morning, in the middle of Covid, where so much of our lives are centered at home. These days many of us are working from home, and we're certainly spending more time than we used to at home. Our calling is to follow Jesus Christ. And that means following him home.

Well, Mark tells us that early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus went outside of town to be alone and pray. People were clamoring for Jesus, and the disciples went looking for him. When they found him, urging him to come back home to where people were gathering, Jesus said, "It's time to go on. I've got more preaching and teaching to do. Let's go." And the disciples said, "We're ready!" They looked at one another, turned and looked at the wider world, took a deep breath and said, "Let's begin."

Unless Jesus goes home with us, we won't be able to go with him into the wider world. It all starts from home.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God,
Mother of us all. Amen.