

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word, which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. As we seek to understand Your call, Your grace, and the strength of faith today, we pray for Your Spirit to guide us. Open our hearts and minds to Your truth and help us to apply it in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Sermon – “Be the Church”

Today, we are going to look at the heart of our faith, the kind of faith that trusts God even in the darkest hours, even when we cannot see the road ahead.

The words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, ring out with a clarity and power that is as resonant today as it was two thousand years ago. His proclamation, "The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" is a call to action, a summons to a life of faith and obedience. It's a declaration of a new era, a new way of living, a new kingdom.

Jesus' proclamation is an invitation: He invites us to participate in the coming of God's kingdom. This is not a passive observation, but an active engagement. We are not merely spectators of God's work, but participants in it. We are called to repent, to turn from our old ways and embrace the new life that Jesus offers. We are called to believe, to put our trust in the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Let's turn to the Scriptures. In Mark 1:14-20, Jonah 3:1-5, and Psalm 62:5-12. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “And I will make you fishers of people.”

Imagine for a moment that you are Simon or Andrew or James or John, fishing in the Sea of Galilee, going about your daily work. And imagine that a complete stranger comes up to you, someone you’ve never met in your life, and he tells you to follow him so that you can “fish for people.” And imagine that, in response, you drop everything, leave your family behind, and go follow this stranger.

I think that’s how we usually read these call stories of the first disciples. Jesus comes to them as a stranger, calls them to follow, and—miraculously—they do. It’s either a testament to the disciples’ great faith and discernment, or to Jesus’ magnetic personality.

It can also be a bit discouraging. I mean, really, how many of us would answer that call? If a complete stranger came to you and said, “Hey, drop everything and follow me, I have a job for you,” your reaction would fall somewhere between “ignore him” and “call the police.”

If we don’t have the faith to follow Jesus’ call the way the disciples do, then what kind of disciples can we be? That’s the discouraging part, thinking that we are failing to live up to such a high standard.

But there’s another way to hear this story. I want you to listen to it again, but I’m going to tell it a bit differently. Imagine again that you’re Simon or Andrew, James or John. You’re fishing on the Sea of Galilee, going about your daily work. And then Jesus appears—Jesus of Nazareth, his hometown just a few miles away. You know Jesus, you’ve known him practically your whole life. You know there are stories about him, that his mother was visited by an angel, that a heavenly chorus announced his birth, that he is chosen by God.

You know Jesus. You’ve talked to him, listened to him teach. You’ve heard him whisper about the coming reign of God. He’s promised that something amazing is coming, that God is going to redeem God’s people, that the poor will be lifted up and the hungry will be filled. He’s told you that the empire of Rome cannot stand against the Kingdom of Heaven, that God’s faithful just have to hold on a little longer, just wait until the right moment. Wait for the right time.

And then John the Baptist is arrested by the imperial powers, his preaching silenced, his ministry cut off, and Jesus comes to you and says, “The time has come.”

The time has come. John the Baptist has been arrested, and it's time for Jesus to begin his public ministry. Jesus is saying to these first disciples, "Hey, remember everything we talked about, everything we've prepared for? It's time. Now is the time."

You see, I don't think the calling of the first disciples is about them dropping everything to follow a complete stranger. I think it's about following a teacher, a leader they already know. Jesus is telling them, "My work is entering a new phase, the time has come for me to travel and preach and heal, so come, follow me."

Jesus isn't asking his disciples (or us!) to follow a complete stranger into a completely unknown mission. Jesus is telling them, "You know everything we've talked about, everything you've been preparing for? It's time to put that into action. Come on, follow me, I'll show you what to do."

That's a message we can still hear today. Most of us are never going to experience Jesus as a complete stranger telling us to drop everything. If we were raised in the church, or if we've been around the church for a while, then Jesus isn't a stranger to us. We kind of know who this guy is.

So, we don't experience Jesus as a complete stranger calling us to follow him into the unknown. Instead, we experience Jesus as an old friend who has taught us well and now calls us into action. Jesus says to us, just like the first disciples, "The time has come. Everything you've learned, everything you've heard, everything you've prepared for. It's time. Let's go."

The ministry of the church can't stay inside the church walls forever. Granted, what we do inside these walls is important. Here, we teach children and adults, we grow in understanding, we sustain faith through prayer and song and scripture, we are fed with the body and blood of Christ in communion. Here, we are prepared, we are equipped, we are strengthened, we are made ready. And then Jesus tells us, "It's time, come, follow me," and heads out the church doors into the world.

Jesus calls us out, beyond the church walls where we have learned and grown in faith, out into the world that so desperately needs the good news Jesus brings.

We are the church, and the church is not defined by this building, these walls. We are the church, the Body of Christ. It's our job to be the presence of Christ in the world. We can't do that if we stay here forever. The time has come, we need to get out there and be the church in the world. We come back to the church building, of course. We come back every week to be fed, sustained, strengthened, supported. But that's an hour or two a week. What are we doing with the other 166 hours? That's when we're out there in the world, being the church, doing ministry, working as God's hands and feet.

Jesus called his disciples to become fishers of people. He called them to follow him, to share the Good News, to make more disciples. Those first disciples made more disciples, shared the story, extended the ministry of Jesus across the globe and through the centuries.

Jesus calls us, too. It's not the voice of a stranger asking us to drop everything. It's the voice of our teacher, our Lord, calling us to be the church. Not to go to church, but to be the church. Remember that we are the church—not the building, not the institution, but the living church, the Body of Christ. We are followers of Jesus. So, live out your calling. Ask yourself, how is Jesus calling us? How do we hear Jesus saying, "The time has come, now get going—follow me!"

Transition. Now, let's move forward, hand in hand, heart to heart, guided by the light of His Word. Are we ready, dear ones, to heed His call, harness His grace, and hold firm in our faith? Let's find out together. Amen.