

Respond

Mark 1:14-20

Pray later

INTRO:

Responding is good, responding is different. Reacting can be good, but it can also be bad. It's really a matter of **emotions** versus **thoughtfulness**. When you react, you use your . . . **emotions**. When you respond, you use your . . . **brains**.

ME:

The difference between **responding** and **reacting** is a difference I realized many years ago. **So why do I find myself reacting so very often?** In traffic, in Walmart, in line at the . . . *well any line!*

YOU:

Did you already realize how responding is different than reacting? Or is this news to you? Either way, let's see what we can learn from Jesus about all this in Mark's Gospel, but first let's pray together:

PRAY

GOD:

Mark 1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

(The Word of God for Us, the people of God, Thanks be to God!)

WE:

For the first time in the Mark’s Gospel, Jesus spoke. **What did he say?** He proclaimed the same message as John the Baptist:

“repent and believe the good news.”

There is also a parallel between the ministries of John and Jesus:

- ***They both preached,***
- ***and they both baptized.***

We might assume that if all Judea and Jerusalem responded to John's message, **how much more would people respond to this message from Jesus?** Mark set the stage for God to reclaim his dominion through his Son. Sadly, Jesus' call to repentance and belief in the gospel only seemed to be hollowly and superficially popular. There was only a minimal response to Jesus' words. Certainly people responded, but nothing like that "**all of Judea**" response received by the John. **Why do you think that is?**

These verses are only to introduce the Galilean ministry of Jesus, speaking in general terms as if this proclamation may summarize the bottom line of his message. Immediately, there was a location change from the wilderness of Jordan to Galilee. "*Immediately*" is a word used often in Mark's Gospel. *Immediately*, Jesus was at the seashore calling disciples and teaching in the synagogue so powerfully that his fame spread to all the region of Galilee. Jesus' fame grew as he healed, cast out demons, and preached with such force that he could not enter a town publicly. *Ironically*, his only option was to return to the wilderness, where people from all directions came to him. The place where John lived in the wilderness, and preached, the place where the people came out to see and hear him, the place where they repented and were baptized was the place where Jesus' ministry returned because of his outward success. Sadly, the further Mark takes his readers on the journey with Jesus, the more his call fell upon deaf

ears and hard hearts. The more Jesus taught about the gospel and the Kingdom, the more people resisted.

The repentance described by the opening words of Jesus should NOT be understood as an act of the will, as if a character in the story merely needed to correct a false notion of religion or revise a cultural norm. They say that repentance is linked to the battle waged in the wilderness on a cosmic scale.

Jesus' first movement into the world to bring his kingdom message was the gathering of his first disciples. These men would play a vital role in the rest of the Gospel story and would be with him day and night for the next three years, until the arrest in Gethsemane. These men would fail, misunderstand, and desert Jesus. Yet for Mark, they were front and center with the entrance of the kingdom of God. Mark's readers will follow their development and ask all future disciples to abandon all and follow Jesus just like they did.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, because they were fishermen. The first four disciples were two sets of brothers: Peter and Andrew then James and John. They would become the inner circle of the Twelve. Jesus ap-

peared by the lake with no announcement, and he chose fishermen from a rural fishing village to lead this new movement. Peter and Andrew might have been poorer than the rest, for they did not even have a fishing boat like the one James and John owned. At first, Jesus did not call out **leaders** but **followers**:

“Come, follow me.”

A literal translation of this phrase is:

“Here, behind Me.”

The person of Jesus must have been the deciding factor, not just his persuasive words. He called them to locate themselves directly in line with Jesus, the teacher. It is best not to hear this in the framework of a rabbi in relation to his students. Rabbis did not call their students; students chose their teachers. The relationship Mark was depicting is similar to a charismatic leader in the line of Elijah-Elisha and may explain why many people misunderstood Jesus to be only an Elijah-like prophet.

Their role was not to be merely passive followers. Jesus said, **“I will make you fish for people.”** This can mean two things:

- *First, Jesus asked his followers to offer to him all they had personally and financially, and Jesus would multiply it.*
- *Second, this call to be **“fishers of men”** echoes profoundly the words of Hebrew Bible prophets who*

used fishing metaphors with reference to drawing people back to God. Jesus may have been aligning his own followers with the covenant promises of God.

He was not moving them in a new direction, but rather making a midcourse correction, bringing them back to a scriptural position. There is a striking difference between this call of Jesus and a Hebrew Bible prophetic call. Jesus called his disciples to follow him. Prophets, such as Elijah, called people to follow God. Rabbis called people to learn and follow the Torah. Jesus was calling them to himself. He expected them to hold nothing back as they followed him.

These brothers *immediately* broke their family ties and left their jobs:

At once they left their nets and followed him (1:18).

So, ***did they respond, or did they react?***

Jesus's ministry begins right after his cousin, John the Baptist, is sent to prison. We don't know why John's imprisonment launched this stage of formal ministry for Jesus. Similar to the prophet Jonah who tells the people of Nineveh to repent, Jesus' call for repentance is quick and to the point using few words. But while Jesus's word count is low, the impact of his words is incredible. In the Common English Bible translation, Jesus says, ***“Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”***

While preaching this powerful and proficient sermon, Jesus calls Simon and Andrew along with the sons of Zebedee away from their fishing profession. Take a step back and consider the teal importance of these four men's decision. These fishermen probably inherited their vocational trade from their fathers, who likely learned from their fathers. We don't know exactly how many generations of fishermen these men had followed. We do know that once they encountered Jesus, they left the security of their jobs to follow him. More than security, they likely faced initial "skepticism" from their friends and families for following a little-known prophet named Jesus. Maybe that's why, toward the end of the Gospel of John, so many of the disciples returned to fishing after Jesus rose from the dead. These men grew up on the sea. **How is it possible that Jesus could have pulled them away from the one thing they knew so well? Had they been waiting for an opportunity to go into ministry? How does the good news of the gospel call us to lay everything aside for the sake of the kingdom of Jesus? What does it mean to be followers of Jesus in the way that Simon, Andrew, James, and John were? How might we calibrate or completely shift away from our comforts and the things we know best to share a gospel that is so urgently needed?**

Will we react? Or, will we respond? And How will we? Will we use our emotions to guide us, or will we use our brains?

Thinking about using our brains makes me think of the game show Jeopardy. On jeopardy you use your brain to respond to the answer with a question. **But how you respond or react if your pronunciation is but off?** A routine taping of Jeopardy! became social media meme fodder recently when a contestant incorrectly pronounced a well-known 90s rap anthem.

Host Alex Trebek read the clue to contestant Nick Spicher: "**A song by Coolio from 'Dangerous Minds' goes back in time to become a 1667 John Milton classic.**" Most pop culture aficionados would recognize these two titles and mash them together, which is what Spicher attempted to do in his answer: "**What is Gangster's Paradise Lost.**"

Everything proceeded normally until later in the taping, Spicher was approached by a producer with bad news—the judges had to rescind his previously awarded money after reviewing his answer, because he had incorrectly pronounced one of the titles.

Coolio's rap song is named "*Gangsta's Paradise*." And according to the explanation on the Jeopardy website, the word "*gangsta*," is wholly distinct from the word "*gangster*."

This makes some sense, as the words evoke different cultural situations. The word "*gangster*" evokes Eliot Ness and Al Capone wearing pinstripes and carrying "*tommy guns*" circa 1920s Chicago. The word "*gangsta*"

evokes Ice Cube and NWA holding sideways Glocks circa 1990s South Central LA. Two different words, two different times, two different meanings.

Spicher was a good sport about the gaffe afterward, saying on Twitter, "**I will be forever proud of the moment that Alex Trebek taught me how to say 'gangsta.'**"

What a way to respond! We should all learn from this wonderful example of using our brains to **respond** even if an emotional **reaction** is warranted! Let's use our brains too!

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Use your brain to respond to life so your emotional reactions don't get you in trouble!

YOU:

So, will you respond, or will you react? Yes. *Oh, and yes!* We will always let our emotions get away from us. But we can work on it. We can be more thoughtful in our responses instead of being robotic in our reactions.

CLOSE:

I recently listened to a class on an app on my iPhone by a Psychiatrist on changing behaviors that might help us in this. Dr. Judson Brewer talks about the three gears of the habit loop and of changing a habit loop. Dr.

Brewer says that in first gear we become aware of the habit loop in which we are caught. In second gear we think about what reward we really get from this behavior. **Is it really worth the reward we will get?** In third gear we step out of the habit loop or change our behavior. Let me show you what I mean with a story from recent history, my recent history.

Susannah's made some chocolate chip cookies. I was in the kitchen alone with them the next morning. I was making my lunch to take to work with me. There is room in my lunchbox for 4-8 cookies. There is more than enough room for that many cookies. But, I picked up one and put it in my lunchbox and closed it up and went on about my morning business. *This is big! Susannah's cookies were perfect! Cooked just long enough. Not too much, just perfect.* And I know how to move the remaining cookies around so it is hard to tell if more than 1 is missing. Granted, if I had taken 4-8 cookies that would be beyond my skill in moving cookies around. But since I used my brain to recognize I was caught in a bad habit loop, and my brain helped me realize the reward was not getting rid of my extra weight I shifted into 3rd gear . . .

and. I. took. only. 1. Cookie!

And I ate it slowly at lunch and I really enjoyed it.

That is a much better reward than indigestion and acid reflux and bloated belly!

Let's pray as we respond to God's Word...