

Grace and peace be yours from God our Sovereign and from our Lord and savior, Jesus the Christ, and from the Holy Spirit. Amen

Did you know that in Mark's Gospel there are three call stories. The first occurs near the beginning of the Gospel and it is the one most are familiar with. The call to Follow Jesus, and he will make us fishers of men.

The second call occurs near the middle of Mark's Gospel, after Jesus has demonstrated his authority, and his compassion through acts of ministry, which antagonize the religious and political leaders of the day. This time, Jesus calls any who would follow and be his disciple with these words: "Take up your cross and follow me.

It is this second call that is the subject of our reflection today.

From the 17 Chapter of Gospel according to St. John, the 18<sup>th</sup> verse, Jesus prays: *"As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."* This is our text.

Jesus was under no illusion about being sent out into the world to accomplish the Father's will, namely the restoration of all creation. He was a man with a mission! Nor was he under any illusion concerning the cost of discipleship either for himself or for those who followed him. He knew that proclaiming the reign of God to be at hand, would be like upsetting the apple cart for those who believed themselves to be in charge. His message would be, upsetting, disturbing, even threatening - to those who thought the world was fine just the way it was.

Consider the opening scene of his public ministry in Luke's gospel. Jesus, enters a synagogue, reads from the prophet Isaiah, concerning the transformation of this world, reads about preaching good news to the poor, about bringing release to the captives, giving sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed and proclaiming the year of Jubilee. All seems to be going well until he preaches on the Isaiah text by saying, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled." As the implications of God's Jubilee year being at hand, begins to sink in, they attempt to kill Jesus.

It's the same in Mark's Gospel, when the implications of Jesus challenge to the debt code becomes clear in his healing of the paralytic, the Pharisees and the Herodians form an unholy alliance and begin to plot how they can kill him. Very early in the Gospels of both Luke and Mark, Jesus is a marked man. Matthew is even more up front, having the slaughter of the

innocents embedded right in the opening birth narrative. It is clear in each of the synoptic gospels that Jesus is a marked man. The keepers of the status quo want nothing to do with him. As far as they are concerned Jesus is a trouble maker, a rabble rouser. And they feared him and sought to kill him. The Roman and Jewish leaders of the then current domination system hated and feared Jesus.

The biblical shorthand for identifying this entrenched system, that rewarded the few at the expense of the many, is simply “the world”. And it is “the world” that stands in opposition to the reign of God.

So when the bible speaks about “**the world**” it is not speaking about the cosmos but about the political system of domination. And when the bible speaks about the **Kingdom of Heaven**, it is not referring to some distant time and place outside of this universe. It is speaking of the physical reality of here and now, of this world, of this domination system being transformed by God’s will, following God’s way of distributive justice. The world and the Kingdom of heaven are not lineal and spatially separated references, one here and now the other out there and in the future. They co-exist, side by side, right here and right now.

Make no mistake, the earthly Jesus was an agent of the Father’s will. As such, he was no friend of the domination system or the status quo. He was an enemy of the state. And the state would eventually execute him for treason. This is the context of Jesus praying: *“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”*

So the question this morning is? “What does it mean for us to be sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world?”

Discourse is difficult to read and comprehend and to our untrained ear may even seem to be rambling and disjointed.... yet it is the very heart of John’s Gospel.

Chapter 17 is often referred to as Jesus’ high priestly prayer; it stands at the end of a long discourse in which he makes the following points to his disciples:

1) You did not choose me, but I chose you. And appointed you to go and bear fruit; ..... 2) you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world therefore the world hates you; and ..... 3) If the world

hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.

In the high priestly prayer, which is our text for today Jesus prays what in some respect might be a very strange prayer. Listen to its main points.

Anticipating his death at the hands of the world, Jesus prays:

“And now, I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one”. ... “Holy Father, ... I am asking on their behalf ...., protect them ... that you have given me”.

What a strange prayer to our normal way of understanding Jesus. Jesus says: “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, ....” that is, He does not pray that we be removed from harms way, or shielded from the world’s hatred. No in fact, the implications of his prayer are just the opposite.... that is he is sending us into the world to continue the work of seeking distributive justice and to do non-violent confrontation with the powers of this world.

So if Jesus is sending us into the world, and if he is inviting us to pick up our cross and follow him ..... how do we understand his petition to “protect us from the evil one?”

In the war of myths, Jesus prayer is not that we would never encounter a cross, but rather that in that moment of truth, we not be seduced (by the evil one by the powers and principalities,) into giving up on the way of the cross. His prayer is that we not reject the way of God and embrace the way of the world. Jesus prayer, is that when faced with opposition, we have the faith and courage to stand firm.

Now if all of this seems a bit overwhelming, a bit daunting, hear is the good news. Jesus has called us and appointed us to bear much fruit, that he has sent us into the world as the Father has sent him into the world, and that he has done this so that our joy may be complete. That we may be one with God, even as Jesus was.

This all seems so foreboding, so frightening, but this is the point. It is not our actions that transform the world but it is God working in and through us, just as he worked in and through Jesus, that brings about the world’s transformation. We have been told that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches and that apart from him we can do nothing. But if we abide in him we can bear much fruit. In fact, Jesus said: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Jesus said that he has told us these things so that our joy may be complete. And that we will be one with the father even as he is one with God.

Remember, I said there were three call stories in Mark. The third one appears in the Easter message at the empty tomb. It is found in the words of the young man at the tomb and his message to Mary Magdalene.

It comes after the disciples fail to stay awake with him and pray,

It comes after Peter, representative of all the disciples who denies even knowing Jesus,

It comes after all of them have deserted Jesus at the cross.

It is a powerful message of hope and reconciliation. "Go tell my disciples, and Peter, that he is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him."

Now if you understand Mark's use of metaphor and symbolism, here is the message, go to the place of ministry, engage in ministry in true discipleship that there you will meet the crucified and risen Lord. There, in true discipleship, you will have your joy complete!

Christ is Risen!

Amen.