

Coming through the Call

We may think of an epiphany as a novel idea and possibly a new trajectory for our lives. The Season after the Epiphany can be a time to settle into a new sense of call or a renewed sense of purpose. This week, we study texts that highlight the topsy-turvy, surprising aspects of this season of sustained discovery.

Focus scripture: Mark 1:14–20

Jesus calls out to fishers as they work. Andrew, Simon, James, and John are all compelled to drop everything when they hear Jesus inviting them out of their routines and away from their established identities. They may not have known the story of Jonah or the psalmist's argument in favour of trusting God alone, but we do. We can choose to believe that God will shape our lives, configure them and reconfigure them as often as necessary.

Jonah 3:1–5, 10 Do you know how long it would take to walk across your city? Jonah had a message to deliver and walked for an entire day into a city that takes three days to walk across. He didn't walk the outskirts of the city where it would have been easier to escape but walked so far into the city that he would have been in real trouble if the message was not believed; to turn and run would have been impossible. Jonah was all in, and it worked. The people believed.

Psalm 62:5–12 explains that when you wait and rest with confidence in God, you can stop worrying about status, riches, and even hear the voice of God a little more clearly.

Paul writes on this theme to the Christians in **1 Corinthians 7:29–31**. He explains that everything impossible is possible; everything you thought you knew or were called to do will pass away. If your life is sad, live as if you can celebrate; if you are celebrating, live as if you know sadness. Let go of your possessions; let go of the world you know.

These are helpful poetic ramblings that hedge toward mystical proverbs by which to live. There are Zen stories like this: characters encounter a thief in their homes and insist on caring for the one who would rob them; monks carry wealthy men or women through mud, enduring the physical weight but also the insult of the task. When asked, "Why would you carry such a person?" the wise monk instead asks the novice, "why do you still want to carry the weight of the insult? Perhaps your load is heavier than mine was. I put myself to the task; once completed, I let it all go." If you think that it is ridiculous to protect the perpetrator of a crime, you're not alone! The scriptures do not teach us to seek trauma or endure abuses. Instead, Jonah, Paul, and the author of the psalm recognize how much danger surrounds God's people and tell stories of resilience, recovery, and renewal for all God's people when we can overcome our bias and anxieties.

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This week's readings make compelling arguments for us to drop everything when we are invited to a deeper relationship with God. It can be challenging to leave behind what we once found reliable. What will you leave behind as you discover more about God's persistence, protections, and power? What can you do to feel free to move through this season in the company of the Christ?



Focus scripture

Mark 1:14–20

Additional scriptures

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

Psalm 62:5–12

1 Corinthians 7:29–31

Persistent God. You are the credible incredible and the probable impossible. We ask that you show us how and when we are called to you by you. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Younger children in this age group will usually follow willingly those with whom they have a relationship, such as a parent, and those whose authority they have been taught to recognize. Older children are learning that they can make choices about who they will or won't follow, sometimes needing to resist peer pressure. Having individual friends and finding community in peer groups are very important for children in the older age group. They may be especially interested in joining and creating clubs and they are apt to be interested in an activity if their friends are also participating.

In this week's story the children will hear that they too can respond to Jesus' invitation to follow and help share the good news of God's love. Sadly, in today's world, we must always caution children about talking with and following a stranger. Since they are rightly taught not to go with strangers it will be helpful to emphasize that the disciples were adults who had probably heard about Jesus before he invited them to come and work with him. As you talk about following Jesus, help the children to understand that they can follow Jesus by continuing his ministry. Pray for the children as they explore what it means to follow Jesus and bring God's love to the world.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Mark 1:14–20, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 67). Review the article "[The Gospel According to Mark](#)" (p. 105), if not reviewed earlier.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and *CD player*; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with a green cloth, Christ candle, Bible (with bookmark placed in focus passage), bowl, and a jug of water.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the "Circle Song" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[Spreading the Good News](#)."
- ❑ **Bible research group:** bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[Fishing in Galilee](#)."
- ❑ **Story group:** bring biblical headdresses, if desired.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** fish template (see [pattern](#) on p. 102) cut from cardboard, construction paper, art supplies, sequins, poster board with the title, "We are following Jesus"
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** information about Haiku poetry from the resource sheet "[Patterns and Poetry](#)" (p. 102)
- ❑ **Music zone:** "The Galilee Song" (lyrics pp. 38–39 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #8 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ **Game zone:** large soft ball
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Jesus Calls Us](#)"

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



January 24, 2021

Coming through the Call

Scripture

Mark 1:14–20

FOCUS To hear the call to follow Jesus in the story of the call of the fishers

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Remind children that we are in the Season after the Epiphany, a time when we hear stories about Jesus and the disciples.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and remind the group that the colour green marks this season of growing and learning about Jesus.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the “Circle Song” (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Prayer ritual Come, let us remember God’s love poured out over all creation and us. (*Pour water into bowl.*)

Let us remember the light of God’s love that Jesus brought to our world. (*Light the candle.*)

God’s love shines out for you and me. (*Invite the children to repeat this line after you.*)

Receive the offering and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to play a type of “Follow the Leader” game by gathering in a circle. Have one person (“It”) leave the area while a leader is chosen. The leader initiates actions, which the rest of the group follow. As the leader changes the actions, the person designated as “It” watches the group and tries to identify the leader. Play the game a few times so that several children have turns being “It” and being the leader. Afterwards, talk about what helped to identify the leader. Explain that today’s Bible story is about a leader and a group of people who decided to follow this leader.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Help children recall the stories of call explored during the last two weeks: Jesus being called by God during the baptism in the River Jordan and Samuel being called by God during a night in the temple. Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the focus passage. Explain that this week we go back to the gospel of Mark to hear more stories about Jesus. Today’s story takes place a little while after Jesus’ baptism

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet “[Spreading the Good News](#)” (based on **Mark 1:14–20**) to tell the story, inviting the children to do the actions for each phrase in bold print.

■ What big change did Jesus ask the fishers to make?

Invite the children to imagine the disciples sitting together beside this lake, talking about what happened that day when they left their fishing boats to follow Jesus. Ask children to imagine how the fishers might have been feeling. Take turns finishing the following sentences: “I am excited about joining this adventure with Jesus because...” and “I’m worried about following Jesus because...”

■ Why do you think the fishers decided to leave home to follow Jesus?

■ How might knowing that they were with friends have helped them make that decision?

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Bible research group The children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about fishing in Jesus' time. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Fishing in Galilee](#)" and invite children to read the information and find the area called Galilee and the Sea of Galilee on the map. Review the qualities needed to be a good fisher and invite those who wish to share about times when they have been fishing with a relative or friend.

Story group Invite children to imagine what might have happened after Jesus asked the fishers to follow him. Invite those who wish to put on a

biblical headdress and take turns telling a story about what it was like to leave their homes and go with Jesus: to whom did they say goodbye, what did they take with them, how did they help Jesus share God's love?

Reporting Invite the research group to report on their discussion and the story group to offer some of their stories.

The Bible story and us

Jesus invited people to leave their everyday lives and follow him on a new journey. We are following in Jesus' way today whenever we share God's love.

■ **What kinds of things can we do to show that we are followers of Jesus?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Poster** Jesus' followers still share the good news of God's love today. Distribute fish templates and invite children to cut out fish shapes from construction paper. Have them print or draw on each fish shape one way people can share God's love. Have them colour and decorate their fish and glue onto the prepared poster board. Display in the church hall. Place extra fish shapes and markers in a basket and invite other members of the congregation to create their own fish to add to the display.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Poetry** People are still called today to follow Jesus and show God's love. Distribute information about "[Haiku poetry](#)" (see p. 102) and invite children to think about ways they can be followers of Jesus and write haiku poems to describe ways that they can share God's love.
- ❑ **Music zone: Song reflection** "The Galilee Song" tells the story of today's scripture reading. Distribute copies of the song lyrics and listen to the record-

ing. Invite children to make hand motions to go with each verse. Practice the song together and plan how you might share it with other church school groups or the rest of the congregation.

- ❑ **Game zone: Ball toss** Invite children to play a game to explore some of the things they could do as followers of Jesus to show God's love. Gather in a circle and take turns tossing the ball to each other. As each person catches the ball, children name one way they might show God's love this week before tossing the ball to another. Play the game until all have had a turn.
- ❑ **Outreach zone: Discussion** People are still called by Jesus to help others. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Jesus Calls Us](#)" and invite the children to work with partners to brainstorm ways that they and the church might follow Jesus by helping others. Share ideas and choose several to share with church leaders.



Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the candle. Read the chorus of “The Galilee Song.” Have children spend a few moments thinking about ways in which they can be followers of Jesus.

Pray O God,

Jesus called some fishers to help share your message of love.

Thank you for calling us to be your helpers too.

Help us to listen for your call. Amen.

Sing, if possible, the song “May You Find Peace” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, “(Name), you are called by Jesus to show God’s love to others.”

Reflect

In what ways do the children see themselves as followers of Jesus with a message of good news for others? What ideas did they have for showing God’s love? Could you incorporate some of their ideas in a group service project?



Spreading the Good News

(based on Mark 1:14–20)

Keep the children involved in the story with an active role to play.

(Practice these cues and responses with the group. Whenever they hear “God’s love,” they put their hands over their hearts. Whenever they hear “fishers,” they pretend to cast fishing nets. Whenever they hear “it was time,” they tap their wrists with index fingers.)

It was time! Jesus knew deep down inside that **it was time** to tell everyone about **God’s love**. Jesus heard God’s Spirit calling,

“Are you ready to spread the good news? Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose.”

So Jesus walked all over Galilee telling the good news to everyone.

“I have a message for you,” Jesus called out. “**God’s love** is for everyone. Turn to God and follow in God’s loving ways.”

People were glad to hear about **God’s love**. Many people decided to follow in God’s loving ways. Telling about **God’s love** was a big job. So many people wanted to hear the good news. “I need helpers,” Jesus thought. “I can’t do this alone. Who could help me?”

Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, watching the **fishers** at their boats, mending nets, cleaning their boats. He saw Simon and Andrew, brothers

who were **fishers**. The brothers had talked long hours with Jesus.

“Friends,” called Jesus. “Follow me and I will make you **fishers** of people, not of fish. You will bring people close to God by telling them about **God’s love**.”

Simon and Andrew heard God’s Spirit calling,

“Are you ready to spread the good news? Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose.”

In a flash the brothers left their nets and followed their friend Jesus. Farther along the beach, they came to James and John. These two brothers were **fishers** too. Jesus called to them, “Friends, follow me and I will show you how to be **fishers** for people, telling about **God’s love**.”

James and John heard God’s Spirit calling,

“Are you ready to spread the good news? Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose.”

They too left their boat and followed their friend Jesus. From that day on the lives of these four **fishers** were completely changed. They had a new job to do. Now **it was time** to help Jesus spread the good news to everyone.

Sometimes they shouted the good news out loud to a crowd!

Sometimes they whispered it softly to just one person.

Sometimes they didn’t say a word, but showed **God’s love** by helping others.

Slowly, slowly the good news of **God’s love** spread across the countryside.



Fishing in Galilee

Galilee is the northern rocky region of Israel, and is centred around the Sea of Galilee, which is really a lake. Because the region of Galilee has water, rain, and moderate temperatures, many different kinds of plants grow there.

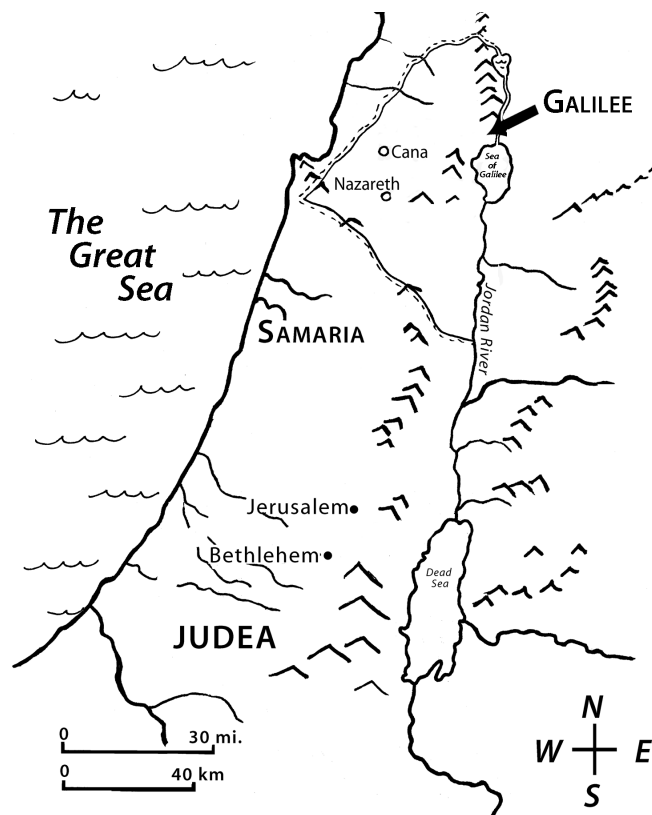
The Sea of Galilee is the largest lake in Israel, measuring about 21 km/13 miles long by 13 km/8 miles wide. Its water primarily comes from the Jordan River. If you were on the lake today, you would discover that storms appear very quickly, though the water is usually calm.

In Jesus' time, people lived in villages all around the lake and travelled by boat across the lake to trade with each other. Fishing was one of the main occupations of people who lived there, and if you owned your own boat, you were fortunate.

People who fished cast nets. Their nets were small and had weights around the edge. The net was thrown into the water from the shore or from a boat. Nets had to be cleaned and repaired every day.

People who fished for a living had to be skilled. Here are some of their skills and abilities. They had to:

- ***take care of boats and nets, keeping them clean and mended***



- ***look hard for fish and be patient and strong even when finding fish took a long time***
- ***work with other people as a fishing team on a boat***
- ***be courageous and strong when they faced big storms and heavy winds***
- ***be willing to work hard, even when they felt tired.***



Jesus Calls Us

Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John to help him tell the good news of God's love. Jesus calls us to do that too, especially by showing God's love to all.

Find a partner and select one of these paragraphs to read and discuss. Choose one of your ideas to make a poster to display in your church.

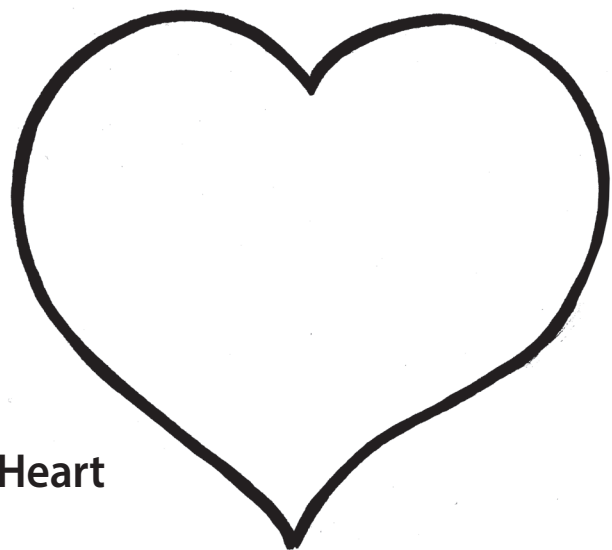
- Many people in the world are hungry because their countries do not have enough food or clean water. What are some things that Jesus might call us to do today to help them?

- Some older people around us are often lonely. Some have barely enough money for their food and medicines. Some are unable to leave their homes to come to church or to go to other activities. What are some things that Jesus might call us to do today to show love to these people in our community?

- The earth is God's beautiful creation and we are supposed to take care of it. But the earth is in trouble because of the pollution by our activities. What are some things that Jesus might call us to do today to save the earth?

- Not all people have doctors or hospitals in their communities. They have to travel long distances for the least kind of medical care. What are some things that Jesus might call us to do today to help these people?

Patterns and Poetry

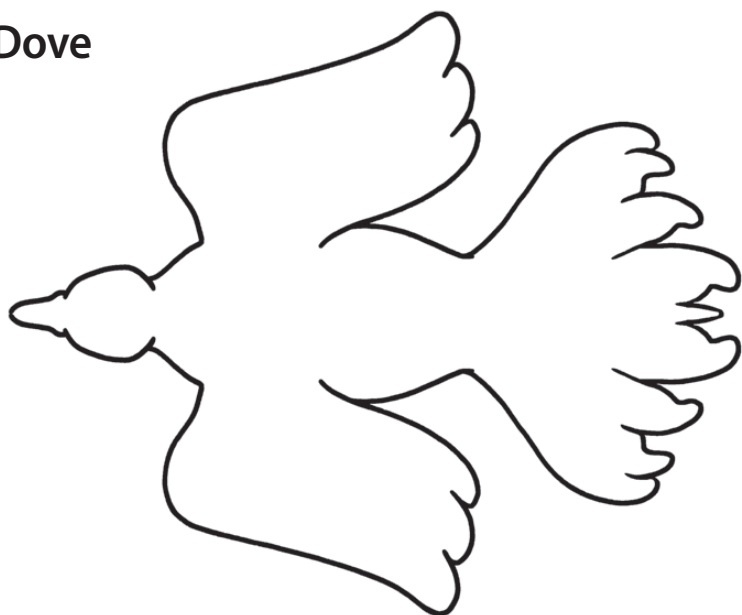


Heart



Star

Dove



Fish



Haiku poems

Haiku poetry is a type of Japanese poetry that has three lines, written in this pattern:

Line 1 – five syllables

Line 2 – seven syllables

Line 3 – five syllables

Example:

Love, Peace, Hope, and Joy

Advent candles bring new light

Helping us to wait



The Gospel according to Mark

By William Loader

Mark, the shortest gospel, written probably around 70 CE, set the pattern for the others to follow. After just 13 verses, it gets us into Jesus' ministry straightaway, with no Christmas stories; probably not even knowing them, because Mark's Mary does not really understand who Jesus is (3:20–21). Straight off the plane we hit main street: the baptism scene tells us most of what matters (1:9–11). Heaven is meeting earth, the divine, the human. The Spirit is on Jesus. Jesus is God's son. Foreshadowing the later doctrine of the Trinity, it is as though it holds out a sign saying: "Expect God in what follows!"

The temptations follow (1:12–13), giving us our first major clue why all this is good news and why people called the whole writing a good-news-thing, "a gospel." For there, Jesus confronts Satan. Announcing the reign of God (1:14–15) means announcing liberation from the demonic powers that oppress people. Thus, Jesus' first action after making recruits is to free a man from his demons (1:21–28). Mark, as they came to call the gospel's anonymous writer in the second century, used that world's concepts to describe what we might describe in other terms; but the impact of the good news is very clear in the stories the writer tells. Jesus' actions bring healing, physical and spiritual, restore the marginalized and the self-marginalized to community, and create good news on the ground in actions and words that speak of love and forgiveness, already offered freely to all by John the Baptizer (1:4–5).

Mark's stories show that some people found Jesus' approach annoying, because he gave such priority to human need above other biblical commands, such as Sabbath and purity laws (2:1–3:6). These conflicts reflect tensions both from Jesus' day and from later

times. Mark is closest to Paul in concluding that you cannot impose biblical requirements in all situations, especially as the movement spread outside its originally Jewish culture. Circumcision had to go, as did much else. Mark cleverly employs the feedings of the 5000 and 4000 as symbols of Jesus offering bread to both Jews and Gentiles (6:30–44; 8:1–9, 14–21). The gospel writer's take on one of Jesus' sayings (7:15) suggests that biblical laws about clean and unclean food never did make sense because food just enters the stomach and then the toilet (7:17–23). Matthew and Luke see it differently.

Mark uses stories symbolically. So on either side of the three occasions when Jesus announces that his is the path of serving and facing suffering and the disciples fail to grasp it (8:31–33; 9:31–34; 10:32–45), we find Jesus healing the blind (8:22–26; 10:46–52)! Mark's most confronting statement about greatness in leadership and life is in his account of Jesus' death. Is he the anointed one (the messiah), the king, the Son of God? Yes, he is (8:27; 14:61–62), but his throne is a cross and his crown is made of thorns! The writer of the gospel of Mark was obviously not taken in by Roman propaganda about the emperor as son of God and bearer of "good news." The message is subversive.

Mark appears to have deliberately painted the disciples as failures (8:21; 14:50), perhaps because they were, perhaps as an educational strategy to challenge believers in the writer's own time. Women disciples, whom he largely neglects until at the cross (15:40–41), do much better, but even they fail in the end (16:8). Yet pessimism and cynicism are not Mark's goal. For his story makes it clear that it did not stop at the women's silence (13:9–10). Something must have turned it around. God turned it around, so that the other side of the disciples' failure is faith in the generosity of God, who despite their failures is prepared to get Peter and the disciples, women and men, back on their feet (16:7). That remains good news for us all.

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