

January 21, 2018
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1:14-20

14 After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 15 "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

16 As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen.

17 Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." 18 Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. 19 He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John. They, too, were in a boat mending their nets. 20 Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.



This place along the west shore of the Sea of Galilee is thought to have been the place where Christ first called his disciples. This is the only other place where flowing, fresh water which is necessary for cleaning nets, can be found other than the Jordan River itself.

Photo courtesy: Bro Alan, Israel 2012

Background

The gospel text for last Sunday was John's account of the call of the first disciples. As was mentioned last week, John presents the call of the first disciples in a way that his community could recognize as having similarities to their own coming to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Mark begins his gospel with John the Baptist in the desert announcing a baptism of repentance, to prepare for the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Mark then tells of the baptism of Jesus. Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert for forty days where he lived among the wild beasts, was tempted by Satan, and then was ministered to by angels. All these events are told with brevity (14 verses), and then Mark takes up the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The beginning of that ministry is described in the gospel text for this Sunday.

Mark's text does not make clear why he chose to mention the arrest of John the Baptist. Scripture scholars believe that initially Jesus may have been a disciple of John, setting out on his own after John was arrested. (John 3:22) However, here Jesus is portrayed as traveling among the towns and villages of Galilee rather than in the desert wilderness, which was the backdrop of John's ministry. The message of Jesus in verse 15 is very similar to that of John as described in other gospels. "In those days John the Baptist appeared preaching in the desert of Judea (and) saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1-2)

The "kingdom of God" was loaded with meaning for the people of the day. The earliest traditions would identify the people of Israel as the kingdom of God. God was understood as the true ruler of the people. The king ruled only as a representative of God. The failure of this system led many to put their hope in some future intervention by God, rather than hoping for a faithful ruler who would re-establish the kingdom of God. Jesus' proclamation states simply that "now is the time" when the hoped-for future kingdom of God has arrived and the time for hoping is over. The "time of fulfillment has arrived" would be a message that stirred people deeply. Jesus' proclamation is a bold statement that would have also attracted the attention of the political and religious leaders who would have found such comments a threat.

The announcement of the gospel is followed by Mark's account of the call of the first disciples – the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John. These disciples are called not just to be pupils of the teacher, which was the traditional role of disciples of the day, but they are also called to work with

Jesus in gathering other disciples. They are to become “fishers of men.” In exchange, they are invited to live with him, but they are not told where. They must be willing to learn by being with Jesus and letting him lead the way. These men of responsibility are being asked to leave their families, the sea, and a way of life that was successful, and become dependent on Jesus. In addition, this would have been a significant break with the basic understanding of family responsibility upon which much of the society of the day was based. Many would have looked on such a move with disdain.

Reflection Questions

1. Are there areas in your own life where you have hoped for change for many years?
2. What do you think it was like for the Jews to sustain their hope in a Messiah for generations?
3. Upon the arrest of John, what do you think are some of things that Jesus thought about before he decided to continue to proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom?
4. Why do you think Andrew, Peter, John and James would have made good disciples?
5. In Jesus' day there were many who admired him, his teaching, and the way he lived his life, and some became his followers. Are there places in your life where you are more admirer than follower?
6. Imagine yourself in the boat with James and John. What would be going through your mind as you watch them leave the nets, get out of the boat, and begin to walk away with Jesus?
7. Can you also imagine that you are again in the boat and Jesus also invites you to come join him? What goes through your mind and you consider Jesus' invitation?
8. Can you talk with God about your desire to be one of his disciples, about whatever keeps you from responding to God as fully as you would like, or about some other facet of this gospel that caught your attention?

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The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.
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