

**January 24, 2021**  
**3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Mark 1:14-20**

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

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. 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. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.



**Background**

Last week the gospel text was John's account of the first disciples coming to Jesus. This Sunday the gospel is taken from Mark, and it also describes the first disciples to join Jesus, but this time it is from a different perspective.

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. He then describes the baptism of Jesus. Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert for forty days where he lives among the wild beasts, is tempted by Satan, and then is 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.

The text begins with a simple statement that the events here took place after John has been arrested. It is not clear from the text 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 only 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 reestablish 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. This message that "the time of fulfillment has arrived" would stir people deeply. It is also the kind of bold statement that would have attracted people's attention. Those who lived with the burdens of heavy taxes and an oppressive foreign government would have heard this with hope. But the political and religious leaders would have found such comments to be threatening.

This brief summation of Jesus' message is followed by Mark's account of the call of the first disciples – the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John. These disciples are called to be more than just pupils of the teacher, which was the traditional role of disciples of the day. 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 Jesus, 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 brought them a certain degree of success. By becoming disciples, they exchange their familiar daily life for the unfamiliar, including dependence on Jesus. It was also a significant break with the basic understanding of family responsibility, a foundational value of their society. Many would have looked with disdain on such a move as what the new disciples chose to accept.

### Reflection Questions

1. Think about the most radical change that you have had to make in your life.  
What brought it about?  
What were some of the things affected by the change?  
Were there people who were supportive? Were there also people who were upset?  
What were some of the emotions you were feeling at the time?
2. Given the reality of our world and how you are being affected, what are some of the changes that you hope for today?
3. Whether or not Jesus was present when John was arrested, what are some of the many things that would have gone through Jesus as he dealt with John's arrest?
4. Picture yourself as one of these early disciples. What are some of the things that go through you as hear Jesus asking you to leave your way of life and become one of his disciples?
5. Could Jesus be asking you to be his disciple, now, today? What stirs in you as you consider that possibility?
6. Can you talk honestly and openly to Jesus about your response to that possibility?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.  
They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.  
<https://fsccl-calledtobe.org/>

