

A SERMON PREACHED ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2018 AT BETHANY BEACH CHRISTIAN
CHURCH, BETHANY BEACH, DE

A little girl was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time, she would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek. She was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again. Finally she spoke up, "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes, sweetheart," he answered, "God made me a long time ago." "Oh," she paused, "grandpa, did God make me too?" "Yes, indeed, honey," he said, "God made you just a little while ago." Feeling their respective faces again, she observed, "God's getting better at it, isn't he?"ⁱ

I thought about this story in preparing for today's sermon. For the past two weeks, I've not been able to preach to you, due to bad weather one week and no heat the next. Although the sermons are on the website, having them preached is not the same as reading them. Last week's sermon was on the call of the disciples, citing the *Gospel of John*. This week's lessons are on the call of the disciples, citing the *Gospel of Mark*. One would think by now we'd be pretty good at telling the story since we're using the same themes two weeks in a row. Were we in a seminary class, the job would be to take the two stories from two different gospels, compare and contrast the two, and see where the differences are. But as I already pretty much did that last week, where do we go from there?

We could do a review, of course, but it'd be better once you've had a chance to read last week's sermon on the website, if you feel so inclined. I think the best course, therefore, is not to go over familiar territory, since that would also include our own personal calls to be Disciples of Christ, a subject we've examined at length in last years' sermons. What would be interesting to examine would be if the gospel text for this morning offers anything new.

The first thing to keep in mind is that Mark was the earliest of the gospel writers, and that Luke and Matthew used Mark to write their gospels, expanding on his stories to fit their own agenda. Mark presents the bare basics, and he does it at a rapid pace, using the word "immediately" ("euthys," in Greek) 42 times.ⁱⁱ In like manner, an amazing 410 of the 678 verses in the gospel begin with the word "and" (the Greek word, *kai*).ⁱⁱⁱ With these two terms at nearly every turn of the text, the gospel rushes along to tell the story with a great sense of purpose. This is particularly true in relating the call of Andrew and Peter, James and John. They hear Jesus, they drop everything they are doing, they take seemingly nothing with them, and go. Immediately. Because of their placement in the story, one gets the idea that they must have already been followers of John the Baptist, so maybe they already knew what it meant to be a disciple and to follow. It certainly had to be dangerous for them as John the Baptist had just been arrested and put into prison. He was imprisoned as a result of his own actions. He was willing to sacrifice his freedom and then his life because of what he believed. John had publicly criticized the king,

Herod Antipas, for his marriage to Herodias, the former wife of Antipas' own brother, which John dared to preach was immoral.^{iv}

Yet the four decided to follow Jesus anyway, despite the danger it brought with it. Jesus had not criticized Herod, but being baptized by John and preaching things that angered the religious and political leaders of the day made him a target for arrest also. Indeed, throughout his ministry, he was almost taken into custody on several occasions, until his ultimate containment in the Garden of Gethsemane during the third and final year of his work among the people of Galilee.

As he calls the disciples, Jesus gives them a message that given its brevity must have seemed very compelling. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Then as he walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." Why was this message so fascinating that men would leave their livelihood and go? It could not have been because Jesus had a reputation as a good fisherman; from all we know, he was a carpenter's son and worked in his father's business. He is later in the *Gospel of John* called the Good Shepherd -- nothing of fish here...So I wonder, what in his message or demeanor compelled this rather rag-tag group to get up and go?

It must have been the apocalyptic vision that the kingdom of God was near. That would be good news, something that one would want to be part of, participate in. It would be as if one were to proclaim today, "come, see, there is a new presidency at hand. Look how this might happen, sign up now to be a part of the movement..." I'm sure were this to happen, there would be folks who would wish to participate, some whom might leave everything and all that they have to see it happen, especially if it were, as indicated in *Mark*, about to take place immediately. Still, it had not happened, and the message itself was rather thin, though long awaited and expected. What made Jesus' version of it so exciting, so worthy of notice?

You'll notice that Jesus does not even tell the fishermen what they will be asked to do (merely follow at this point), nor does he tell them where they are going. Except the fact that they are going to be "people-fishers," there is not a lot of promise in Jesus' call. And what could he possibly mean by that? They don't find out, just immediately follow. And so the rest of the gospel is set up to tell us just how Jesus goes with these and other disciples about the mission of reeling folks into the Way, the Truth, and the Life that he has to offer. We call it and know it as "kingdom work."

Yet, despite the offer it makes for a better world, we're content -- some would say, very content, to let things be as they are. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, we are far too easily satisfied.

We're like a child who turns down an invitation for a day at the beach and chooses instead to stay sitting in a slum alley making mud pies just because the child really can't imagine how much better a day at the shore can be. "What could be better than making these slimy mud pies?" the child might think. Ah, if only he knew!^v

Or as the Christian philosopher Dallas Willard writes, when he was a boy, rural electrification was just happening and power lines were being strung throughout the countryside. But suppose even after the lines were up and running you ran across a house where the weary family still used only candles and kerosene lanterns for light, used scrub boards, ice chests, and rug beaters. A better life was waiting for them right outside their door if only they would let themselves be hooked into the power lines. "My friends," you could proclaim, "electricity is at hand!" But suppose they just didn't trust it, thought it was too much of a hassle, and anyway didn't believe the promises that things might be easier with this newfangled juice running into their house. "If it's all the same to you, we'll stick with the old ways," they'd muse.^{vi}

So maybe the kingdom of heaven is like that -- right outside our door, or perhaps in us -- if we open ourselves to each other enough to share our good news, our good works, our total goodness, to others, those we know, and those we are about to meet. We are promised that it will make a great difference in all the world about us. Therefore, I ask you, just what call do we need to hear, what words do we need to have spoken to get us going? I can remember my mother calling us for dinner, and we'd be slow to respond. She's reprimand us: "What are you waiting for, an engraved invitation?" she'd say. The words of Jesus are just that, an engraved invitation. But will we respond? And how?

Let me pause for a moment and be clear what it is that is being asked of us. Not food, nor clothing (though the shelter could probably use a little of both); not money (though it probably might be helpful), nor a commitment to join a committee or a group within the church (though we do have needs in those arenas). We are being asked to see our own calls, in whatever business or retirement we find ourselves, as an extension of Christ's call to change the world. Have you ever thought how what you do (or do not do) could change the world?

As you know, I'm a fan of Top Ten Lists. Let me share with you the Internet's top 10 scientists of all time.^{vii} Who would be on your list? By consensus on many sites, the top ten are:

- 10. Aristotle (384-322 BC)
- 9. Archimedes(287-212 BC)
- 8. Galileo (1564-1642 AD)
- 7. Michael Faraday (1791-1867 AD)
- 6. Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931 AD)
- 5. Marie Curie (1867-1934 AD)
- 4. Louis Pasteur (1822-1895 AD)
- 3. Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727 AD)
- 2. Albert Einstein (1879-1955 AD)

- 1. Nikola Tesla (1856-1943 AD)

Tesla surprised me, I guess because I was so unaware of all that he did. The Serbian-born scientist is atop the list because of his immense knowledge in different fields of science and technology. Without a question, this 1856 born guy was a cool geek. He could speak eight languages, recite a whole book completely just with one reading, make a device just by seeing it once and not writing down anything. Tesla had developed almost everything by himself and did not expose any of it which later was invented by other scientists in his time. Tesla had generated A/C current before Edison even knew about charges. Marconi, who got the Nobel Prize for inventing radio, used all the ideas of Tesla. X-rays by Roentgen, RADAR by Watson-Watt were both devised by Nikola Tesla. There was almost nothing that Tesla did not do. The first hydro-electric plant in Niagara Falls, experiments with cryogenic engineering, transistors, and the radio wave recorder of sounds in outer space were all built by Tesla. Remote control, neon lighting, the modern electric motor, earthquake machines are among the finest inventions from Tesla. He was a true genius. Tesla made a way to charge a house with electric lightening for electricity purposes but did not share it thinking somebody else would take his discovery and run with it (they did). This incredible mind created a revolution with his inventions. He was a future-thinker and his mind could run on any wavelength (no pun intended). He died tragically in a hotel room and was found dead two days after his death in 1943.^{viii}

That is so much we owe to just one person's mind, to his discoveries, to his willingness to share what he was thinking and doing. Did any of Tesla's inventions (or those of the others in the Top Ten List) bring the kingdom of God nearer? I'd say so! The question is, what do we have to offer, and are we willing to share it with others? Each time we share a little of ourselves, the call of Jesus is answered and we see a bit of God's kingdom breaking through. From where I stand, looking at you, the light emanating *from* you is nothing short of outstanding (albeit that as most of us are in retirement, we may not shine as brightly as we used to [!]).... I believe we *are* being called to step outside of ourselves, and away from wearied ways. Therefore I look forward to all that is possible should we decide to do it together, immediately, now, committed to a new and renewed church life, in the days ahead.

Let us not wait. The time, and its purpose under heaven, is now. The call is out. We have received the invitation. Now let us get up and go.

Amen.

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ⁱ <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20071025024527AAGnVOV>

ⁱⁱ <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Mark-Literary.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} http://www.answers.com/Q/Why_was_John_the_Baptist_put_in_prison

^{vv} http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-3b-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} <http://www.elist10.com/top-10-greatest-scientists-changed-world/>

^{viii} *Ibid.*