

Mark 1:14–28

“God is Near: Work for Peace”

1. I picture myself at home in Mexico as a kid. From the other side of the house, I'd hear my name: “Felipe!”
 - a. It could be dad or mom, or one of my sisters.
 - b. Maybe I had been playing or doing homework or watching TV, but having your name called meant you needed to drop what you were doing and go to the person calling you.
 - c. Now, in Spanish there is a polite way to reply to such a call out.
 - d. (there is the impolite: “What!?” “¿Qué?” but that’s just gonna get you in trouble)
 - e. The polite way to reply is to say “Mande?”
 - f. It’s a super formal thing to say, really, but it’s such a part of everyday life that we don’t really notice. It basically means “Send me”
 - g. And what I’m telling you is that you couldn’t just yell it back, from a distance “Mande?” because I know my dad would reply “¿A quién mando?” “And who exactly am I sending?”
 - h. I am not sure if that was only in my family or not, but to me it just seems normal to have to reply to one’s name being called by actually going to the person who is calling us
 - i. When face to face, then, one finds out what the request or errand would be
 - j. It makes me think of God’s call to the prophet Isaiah, who replied with the sentence “Here I am, send me.” Or like that one hymn we sing here at church which says “Here I am Lord... I will go, Lord, if you lead me.”
2. That childhood memory was awakened when I considered the story we read today of Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee and calling those fishermen to follow him. And they did.
 - a. That feels like the shortest job interview ever, doesn’t it?
 - i. It was likely early in the morning, as fishing in that area and time was mostly done at night or early in the morning. (Malina 180)
 - ii. Maybe Simon and Andrew were casting their net one last time before calling it a day
 - iii. Maybe James and John had been at it all night and now they were closing shop for the day, mending their nets to prepare them for that following night’s work.
 - iv. Curiously there is no dialogue: just Jesus calling them out and them following.
 - b. The way Mark is telling us the story, Jesus was not yet well known, or at least his popularity had not expanded widely.

- i. Last week we read that Jesus started his ministry with his baptism and the temptation in the desert.
 - ii. This week it is the imprisonment of John which leads to now a more public level of Jesus' ministry
 - iii. A scholar (Malina 179) does suggest that Jesus must have been somewhat known to the fishermen because of how fast they joined him (the world "immediately" is a feature in the gospel of Mark, appearing 28 times!)
 - iv. Maybe they had heard him preach his message of repentance and believing in the gospel.
- c. Jesus was forming a group of followers; it feels like a movement with Jesus as the teacher and those who would follow as disciples (Malina 179)
- i. We are not told what qualities Jesus was looking for in his followers
 - ii. But based on the people he gathers, we will eventually realize that it is a gathering of regular folks
 - iii. I'm not saying they were not the best and the brightest, but I'm saying they were not the best and the brightest
 - 1. As one commentator suggested (Rob Bell "Dust" video, Nooma series), the recruitment of top-notch disciples would have happened years earlier, when the recruits were younger
 - 2. Basically, there would have been moments in the religious upbringing of an observant Jew in the first century when their ability for study would have been recognized by a teacher, who would have tapped them to join the teacher.
 - 3. Think of it like being good at a sport, and you play it as a kid, and maybe join a team beyond school, and eventually you get a scholarship to go to college.
 - 4. Well, these fishermen may have been good at some of the study of the scriptures, but they hadn't made the cut.
 - 5. So, they dedicated themselves to the trade of their family. Fishing.
 - 6. No shame in that.
 - 7. But it's puzzling then that Jesus is fishing for disciples here, not at the synagogue.
 - 8. Seen in that context, perhaps it makes some sense that these fishermen were so ready to join Jesus.
 - 9. Maybe they had felt skipped over by synagogue teachers, and now this teacher is seeing them and calling them.
 - iv. The idea that they were going to "fish for people" let the disciples know that they were going to be part of a group which would be seeking more members to join them. This must have been exciting. Or at least more exciting than regular fishing

3. We get a glimpse of what the early ministry of Jesus would have been like by the three sections in our passage, where Jesus is doing more than one call out
 - a. First Jesus is out somewhere in the desert or wandering rural areas calling people to Repent.
 - i. Jesus is picking up where John the Baptizer had left off, who was proclaiming a baptism of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins
 - ii. The message of Jesus spoke of the right time coming to fruition, God's timing
 - iii. Jesus spoke of the Gospel, the Good News of God, and of the opportunity, the call to repent and believe.
 - b. As we saw, he then called people to follow him. And they did.
 - c. And finally in the story in the synagogue, Jesus is teaching and mesmerizing people with his style and content of teaching
 - i. And then, challenged by an unclean spirit, he heals a person by commanding the unclean spirit to come out
 - ii. And the people were amazed, and his fame immediately spread
4. In this season of Advent, a season of preparation when we acknowledge God is near, we are being called to COME near to God as God calls us to follow in Christ's footsteps
 - a. Our Advent preparation focuses on Peace today
 - b. I've had conversations with some of you, who share your anxiety or frustration or despair about the horrors of war we see on TV in Ukraine and Russia, in Israel and Palestine. What can we do? Is your question.
 - c. So, we ponder how we can come closer to God when God calls us to work for Peace
 - i. Maybe an initial step towards God is in repentance, acknowledging when we have been swept up by a culture that praises violence.
 - ii. We come near to God when we ask for peace in our hearts, in the midst of our families, when chaos swirls all around us
 - iii. We come near to God when we hold accountable one another and the people we elect, so that our motivation as a city is to build welcoming community, or as a country to provide not weapons of war but the means for peaceful resolutions.
5. Jesus said to everyday kind of folks: follow me. And immediately they did. As God comes near us, come near to God, following Jesus in to the work of the realm of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Share a story when you felt God's call on you and you came closer to God.
2. In Mark 1:14–28 Jesus calls his first disciples. What strikes you about that story?
3. How is God calling you to act for peace (in yourself, your family, the community, or the world)?

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