

Following Christ

Mark 1: 14-20

Today's gospel lesson picks up on the dramatic beginning of Mark's Gospel's account of the life of Jesus. There is a cosmic struggle of evil against good played out in, through, around Jesus. Baptized by John, Jesus was fully immersed in the new life to which John called the people. Coming up from the water, Jesus is proclaimed by the Spirit, "This is my beloved Son".

Immediately, Jesus goes to the wilderness where he is confronted by a spirit of darkness and evil. He emerges from his wilderness trial and learns of John's arrest. Immediately, he goes to Galilee and begins proclaiming good news of God, a message heavy with eschatological energy: the "time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Then, Jesus walks to the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls two sets of brothers to be his first disciples. Simon and Andrew, then James and John, heard and responded to Jesus' call. They left their fishing boats and followed him. The four probably didn't know what they were getting into, but they had to leave what was familiar in order to follow. They had to let go of the known in order to find out where Jesus would take them, in order to follow him.

This is the second in a six-part sermon series called *The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Living*. These nuts and bolts are six steps in living a Christian life. They include: *Listen to God, Follow Christ, Find Your Voice, Practice Freedom, Develop Discipline, and Experience the Numinous*.

The decision to follow Christ is an ongoing decision. It's only one aspect of the journey, but it's a pivotal one. The focus for today involves the choice, the decision, to follow Christ.

John the Baptizer has been arrested and is soon to be executed. John's demise signals Jesus' beginning. He seemingly picks up John's mantle, calls some to follow him and become disciples. People are still being called to follow Christ and become disciples.

(At this point in the sermon, a brief interview was conducted with a member of the congregation concerning her experience of following Christ: how she had started her spiritual journey, the ups and downs, and what it was like now)

Simon and Andrew, and James and John, heard Jesus call them. They left their fishing boats and followed him. All four probably didn't have a clue what they were getting into, but they had to leave what was familiar in order to follow, in order to find out. That's the way we find out what it means to follow Christ. That's the way we find out what God's call means for us. We find out what it means to follow Christ as we do it.

The sentence "Follow Christ" actually consists of three key words. It only seems like there are two words, but trust me on this.

First, we follow. It's a journey and we're not always in control. To follow means to be in the process of setting off and of letting go. It means to be in the process of

becoming and of arriving. To follow Christ means to step out into life and literally trust Christ with your life.

You is the key, the second key word. "Follow Christ" is a declarative sentence. The pronoun "you" is understood, but should never be overlooked. In a sense, it is about you, sort of.

It is about you being a follower of Christ, a disciple. You are crucial. You are God's partner in God's work. And this is not just any "you" that's involved here. The *you* who follows Christ needs to be the genuine you with all your commitment, passion, hope, and love - the authentic you. To follow Christ means to become more and more the *you* God created. There is good news. We don't start out being that genuine self. In fact, most of us might not be that "you" by the end of our lives. Following Christ is about becoming more genuinely and honestly yourself.

The third key word is obviously *Christ*. Jesus, the Christ Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and God all are names that express the same reality. Christ mediates the reality of God to us. The words and teachings of Jesus, transmitted through the early church, help guide us when they are studied honestly. They help identify the agenda Jesus followed, God's priorities as Jesus understood them: inclusion, forgiveness, justice, and peacemaking. These values guided Jesus' life choices. To follow Christ is to let go our agendas and take on Christ's agenda for life.

The journey following Christ can be the journey of your life. It will transform you. When you follow Christ, the Christ in you will draw people to you. You will become, as Jesus promised, "fishers for people". As you follow Christ, you will begin to see Christ in other people and respond to Christ in other people. The Spirit invites you to let Christ shape your relationships with each other and shape the rest of your life.