

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 1-18-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Mark 1:14-20

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”**

John the Baptist was arrested—literally “handed over” (Greek *paradidomi*). This is the same verb used later in Mark’s gospel to talk about Jesus’ being “handed over” or “betrayed” or “arrested” by the authorities. It is the same word used in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians which we quote in our communion liturgy—“on the night in which he was *betrayed*...” John’s arrest is a reminder to us as readers of the fate that awaits Jesus himself at the end of his earthly ministry. Like John, Jesus will be arrested/handed over/betrayed.

While John’s account indicates that Jesus’ and John’s ministries overlapped slightly, here it appears that John’s arrest is the catalyst that kicks off Jesus’ ministry in earnest. It is noteworthy that Jesus comes to Galilee since John was arrested by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee. In a kingdom ruled by a tyrant who has just arrested (and would later behead) John the Baptist, Jesus begins to proclaim the good news of a different kingdom—the kingdom of God.

This passage looks back toward John’s preparation for Jesus—language about repentance and the brief note about John’s arrest, for instance. But it also looks forward to the ministry of Jesus himself and the proclamation of the early church—“believe in the good news.” Here, repentance and belief are the prerequisites to living the sort of life Jesus calls folks to live.

**<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.**

The first disciples called according to Mark are pairs of brothers—Simon and Andrew; James and John. Our ability to discern their socioeconomic status is murky at best. On the one hand, the brothers are depicted as engaged in the physical labor of fishing here. On the other hand, James and John leave the business in the hands of their father Zebedee and “the hired men” in v. 20. So they were at least well-off enough to afford to pay laborers, but not so well off that they could abstain from physical labor. Further, Simon is later depicted as owning a home in which his mother-in-law lived also. So these men were likely people of at least some means. Their fishing business was active, as they were engaged in the work while Jesus called them, and at least prosperous enough to allow them to afford places to live. Their businesses were family-based. Jesus disrupts, then, not only their source of income, but also their family connections when he calls them to leave their nets and follow him.

**<sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”**

The NRSV translates this phrase differently than what some earlier translates did with it. The phrase literally translates to, “come behind me and I will cause you to become fishers of human beings.” The term *anthropoi* which is here translated as “people” often gets translated as “men” in older versions of scripture. This is the same root word as our modern science anthropology—the study of human beings and civilizations. Modern English conventions favor translating *anthropoid* as “humans” or “people” rather than “men”

because women are naturally included in this call. Had the author intended to say “men only” he would have used the word *andras* meaning “men” rather than *anthropoi*.

In this verse Jesus gives a command and a promise. He simultaneously teaches the disciples their proper place (following or coming behind Jesus) and their proper task (fishing for human beings). This image may have some unsettling overtones for us—the idea of being caught and cleaned is not necessarily appealing. Indeed, in the Old Testament, images of being caught or images of snares and nets are almost always negative images. Here, the idea is that being caught in God’s grace is a good thing.

**<sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

So much in Mark’s gospel happens “immediately.” The word *eutheos*, meaning “immediately,” occurs 40 times in Mark’s gospel—more than in any other gospel. (In fact, more than all the other gospels combined.) In Mark 1 alone, it is used 11 times! The first two disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ call is swift and decisive. There is no time for delay—as Jesus himself said, “the time is fulfilled.” Salvation is now and there is no time to tarry.

**<sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.**

Here, it is Jesus’ call that happens “immediately.” Again, “the time is fulfilled.” James and John leave fortune and family and fish to follow Jesus. Instead of the nuclear or extended family they are used to, they are given new sisters and brothers in Christ. Instead of earthly riches, they are entrusted with the riches of the kingdom. Instead of fishing for fish, they are made to fish for people.

The faithfulness of the first disciples is baffling, considering that they had no prior knowledge of Jesus as far as we know. Jesus’ power and charisma are on full display here. Remember that he is filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit, so none of this happens by purely worldly means. Still, this story must have been a challenge and an encouragement to the early disciples who found themselves facing losses for the sake of the gospel. For us too, this story both inspires and intimidates us. We are called to have such faith, yet we are left to recognize that we do not always seem capable of such commitment.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Compare and contrast this call story with last week’s story from John 1:43-51. What similarities and differences do you notice? Why do you think Mark and John tell their stories the way that they do?**
- 2. Jesus’ call to the disciples involved a huge amount of uncertainty about their future. What uncertainties are you dealing with in life right now? How can you trust God more fully and follow where he leads?**
- 3. What does it mean to “become fishers of human beings?” Does this call only apply to Andrew and Simon, or to all of Jesus’ followers? How might it apply to us in our lives?**