

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

*<sup>16</sup> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.*

*<sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:14-20)*

### **The Best for the Job**

So there I was at the kitchen counter catching up with family friend I hadn't seen in a number of years. Of course discussion about COVID came up along with a bunch of other crazy things going on in the world. As we move along in the conversation he tells me, “I'm so glad I don't have your job.” I chuckle a little to myself and we continue talking. He tells me about how things are going on the farm, the dairy industry, and I tell him, “To be honest with you, I would never want to your job either.” It was never a contest for who has it worse or more difficult. I think we both understood that we wouldn't be the best person for the other person's job.

And we all understand that to a point. We understand the need to find the right person that fits the specific job. If you don't, at the very least it will not be done as well as it could. At the same time, you may be all too familiar with the soul crushing, heart wrenching feeling after being told you aren't the right person for the job. But, once we swallow the hurt, we get it. You can't make the proverbial square peg fit in the round hole. When possible, we want the best for the job. So when you look at Jesus' decision making in Mark 1:14-20, it can seem a little questionable.

John the Baptizer sits in prison. He had preached the truth of God's Word to King Herod. And now he's paying for standing up for the truth. So, there's pressure from the political side of things for anyone who might be connected to John. Then, when Jesus was down in Judea, the Pharisees were starting to get quite upset with him for what he was preaching, teaching, and doing. So Jesus was feeling some heat from the religious leaders as well. No one would have faulted Jesus if he had decided to rein things back a little back. That would have made sense. Instead when Jesus goes north into Galilee he picks up right where John had left with the gospel of God preaching, “**The time has come. God's kingdom is near. Repent and believe the Good News**” (v.15). The time has come. There's no time like the present. The Kingdom of God is near. His rule in

your hearts and lives is at hand. Repent—do not hide from your sins. Do not try and cover them up. Confess and turn from them. Believe the good news that God forgives sinners.

So here we are today. We aren't facing persecution like many Christians face in the world. At the same time, we feel an increased pressure against Christianity in general. Jokes told at the expense of your faith. Mockery that you really believe these things. Pressure to curb the truth and not speak out against what the world accepts and celebrates is something you face. It's not just from the world around you in the news and media. You may feel it from family members and friends who don't support you or question what you are doing with the church. We feel the pressure from declining membership and lack of interest in regular worship. The temptation is that we need to circle the wagons to protect ourselves. Hide behind walls we build for ourselves—I'll believe what I believe and let them believe what they want. There's the temptation to think that if only we had these programs, these types of people, more to offer, that will be the answer. There's the feeling that maybe I shouldn't say anything. They are going to do what they want to do after all. At the very least, curb the truth so it does not offend.

But what does Jesus say? The time has come! Not for fear-mongering, conspiracy-theory feeding, hand-wringing, or building-up of personal walls. No, the time has come to break down walls and share the Good News. Our days are numbered. Time is short, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians. This world is passing away. Repent! Be honest with your own sins and failures. Confess and believe the good news that God's kingdom is not far-off and distant. No, God is with us. Jesus lives! He has destroyed the power of the ruler of this world, the devil. Jesus is still the Lord of all things. Nothing that is happening is a surprise to him. No one has pulled a fast one on him. His kingdom is not of this world. It rules in our hearts through the preaching of the Good News. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus' name. God is with you, today. And if God is for us, who can be against us? The time has come not to hide, but to proclaim.

That's Jesus' plan as he takes a leisurely stroll along the Sea of Galilee. And what does he see? There's Simon and his brother Andrew in a boat fishing. These weren't a couple of brothers out relaxing, drowning a couple of worms. This was their job. This is their livelihood. They were fishermen. And what does Jesus decide to do? **“Come, follow me,”** Jesus says, **“And I will make you to be fishers of men.”** In other words, Jesus is not going to be the only one who spreads the Good News. He chooses fishermen.

What are you doing, Jesus? That hardly seems like the best people for the job. They don't have the religious training to answer the inevitable questions to come in conversations. They haven't been trained in logic and rhetoric to speak eloquently to

wow the people and draw the crowds. They are fishermen. They already have work to do. They are busy enough! How could you ask them?

But, Jesus isn't done. He goes a little bit further along the way where he sees two more brothers. There's James and John the sons of a man named Zebedee working away at the family business mending their nets. And what does Jesus do? He immediately calls them too!

Seriously, Jesus? Fishermen again? They are helping dad out on the boat. They already have a career. Don't forget, these two are known as the Sons of Thunder because they could be a little aggressive and insensitive. Hardly the ideal temperament to bring people in and, yet, you choose them?

Jesus still isn't done. He's chosen you. He's chosen me. He calls us by the Gospel and then sends us out. He calls us to let His light shine in this dark world. He has chosen us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have. He's called you to go out and share the Good News.

But are you sure you have the right person for the job, Jesus? You know your own shortcomings. You know the type of person you are. You maybe have said, "If only I was more like...if only had these skills...if only I wasn't so much like... But that's not me. Someone else should do it." You know your own sins and might wonder, "How could I ever say anything to anyone!" You remember when you've tried and the invitation was shot down, "Does it matter if I try again?" That makes it difficult enough, and then there's the devil whispering in your ear. He's more than happy to remind you of sins you had thought you had forgotten. He likes to bring up the apparent failures to reinforce your thoughts that I'm not the person these people need. He replays conversations you have bungled. He rewinds the times I should have done something different and should have been better. He loves to do that. Your sinful nature loves to do it. Because it crushes our spirit. It leads us down a road of hopelessness. It can lead us to think that being a follower of Jesus is simply something to know. It's just something you learned in Catechism class back in the day. You do it on Sunday mornings when you don't have anything else going on. It means little for your day-to-day life once you walk out of the church doors making you a far easier target for ignoring sin and falling into temptation.

The thing is, for all intents and purposes, the devil's not wrong. Your sinful nature isn't either. In the eyes of the world and my own honest opinion, by myself I'm not the best person for this job. You aren't either. By yourself, you aren't qualified. You have done more than enough to make you a terrible candidate for the position. But let's not stop there. You aren't qualified to be part of God's kingdom either. Your sins have separated you from God. By nature you are dead in sin.

Jesus knows this too. He knows your talents you have, he gave them to you. That's why he knows you are the best person for the job. And the simple fact is: it's not about you but pointing people to him. He knows your failures and sins and what would happen if you are left in the hands of an angry God who hates sin. He knows them, because took them from you. He knows them because he carries them on that cross. He knows what would happen because he suffers, and dies for your sin he claims as his own. But here's the Good News: Jesus lives. Your sins are forgiven. You have peace with God. Through that calling in the Word the Holy Spirit sets you apart as God's child, works saving faith, and sets God's kingdom at rule in your heart. The devil can accuse you all he wants. It doesn't change the fact, he's still a liar. Because Jesus lives, there is now no condemnation for those in Jesus. Jesus has so thoroughly forgiven your sins, he's chosen you to do this important work. He's chosen you not because of the good things you might do. You are chosen because that blood pouring down the beams of that cross has washed you of every sin. He raises you from the dead of sin in the waters of baptism a new creation with a job to do.

Is it going to be easy? By no means. We struggle each and every day against sin and temptation. So we daily live in repentance, confessing our sin and relying on Jesus' forgiveness and love. Jesus gives you the Lord's Supper to receive the forgiveness of sins and strengthening as you go out and do this work.

Is it going to be uncomfortable at times? Of course it will. You are fishing for much more devious and elusive creatures than fish. Humans are trained to look for tricks. They are wary of scams. By nature they do not want to be caught. But with practice, it gets less uncomfortable.

Yes, at times it's going to feel like we are just throwing the net out there catching nothing. But the Lord promises you, your work is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Therefore, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, stand firm. Let nothing move you. You are not in this on your own. Jesus is at work in you and through you to carry out his good purpose. He speaks with your mouth and uses your hands to share the Good News. Then your work is done and he does the rest. He doesn't call you to go into far off distant lands abandoning family, jobs, and careers. He calls you to be parents who raise their children in the Lord. He calls you to be grandparents who continue to encourage your own children and grandchildren. He calls you to be a friend who speaks with the people you know. He calls you in the job or whatever place you are currently in because it's not about you. It's about pointing them to Jesus. Therefore, through Jesus, who graciously called you and powerfully works through you, you are the best for the job. Amen.