

Brave Enough to See It
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
January 24, 2021

Text: Mark 1:14-20

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

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

Prayer

Sermon

Imagine, if you will, the life of Simon and Andrew, brothers, fishermen, on one of the lower economic rungs of their day but not the bottom - part of an artisan class, getting by. No boat mentioned and no help either - but they had food on their plates. A hardy lot, fishermen, used to working all night if they had to, used to the uncertainty of an everchanging catch, used to the Roman occupiers and their Jewish client kings that defined the lives of everyone in first century Palestine. The people of rural Judea were taxed and tithed and tired.

Imagine a little further down shore, James and John, also fishermen, part of a family business that even allowed for hired help - but still under the thumb of Rome. Imagine them, hearing about the little rebellions happening all over the countryside, the separatist groups trying to forge a new way outside of the empire's grasp, and even that John the Baptist fellow.

Well, Jesus proclaimed the good news....to them.

What did good news sound like to fishermen in ancient Palestine?

Looking up from their nets they saw someone walking along the shore, someone who looked right at them with dignity and respect, and said: there's good news! Right now! The moment is here! So repent and change and believe and follow me.

Jesus asked them to repent - The Greek is metanoia. Repent, change, turn around, re-orient.

They could feel the metanoia in their spirits.

And he asked them to believe in the good news - to believe that something big was happening right then, that a new future was possible for them and for their sisters and parents and neighbors, too. Imagine, Jesus asked. Imagine that something could be different. Imagine that right now, this is holy time. The basileia of God is breaking into the world right now, this is kairos time - this is a holy moment.

Imagine: in the midst of their daily struggle, someone came to them and proclaimed good news, proclaimed God's kingdom would overcome Caesar's, proclaimed that that day was holy time, and said: Follow me.

"Jesus is inviting common folk to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege....[Mark's narrative] is a story by, about, and for those committed to God's work of justice, compassion and liberation in the world." -Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man.

And yes they got up immediately and followed him. Immediately. Because part of their call to discipleship was a gift of holy imagination. Holy callings engage us in a future worth working for.

Now, if you're tracking this sermon series, we've talked about epiphanies and revelations; we've talked about testing to make sure a sense of calling is aligned with Jesus' commandments to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves; we've talked about willingness to follow a call. Today I'm focusing on that vision of a better future that emboldens us to follow God's call as individuals and as a church.

This is how Jesus said it: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Right now, in this holy and sacred and critical time - kairos time - time beyond what the clocks and calendars read -

God's dominion - a realm bordered by justice, mercy, compassion and equity -

Is near - is breaking into our existence - is as believable as Rome and far more trustworthy,

So repent, change, transform, turn away from the past -

And be part of the transformation of the world.

Believe in the good news.

These fishermen believed, trusted, and found themselves transformed. They hoped in a new future that they could be part of.

So, friends, what good news is Jesus proclaiming to us? What is the new and better future that we can be part of? What are we noticing in our world that needs us to stand up and immediately follow a call?

And what would the good news look like? What would the inbreaking of God's reign into our way of life look like?

I'm going to name two, one that we have talked about together so often, and one that is particular to this moment,

One of Jesus' calls to his disciples was to create a community of inclusion, welcome, diversity and dignity. Think of Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well; think of those marginalized for their illness but brought into Jesus' community; think of the Syrophenician woman whose assertiveness led Jesus to call her daughter human. This congregation is good at welcome and invitation - from our Open and Affirming welcome to in this time bringing together folks from around the country, we are a community that models "a people diverse and beautiful" - we are modeling and imagining and building a better future.

And in this moment in our world, there is desperate human need - inequity in health care and Corona virus impacts as highlighted in our MLK conversation in Lexington on Monday. A 50% increase in food insecurity. Increasing unemployment. Profound disasters around the world. And we, Pilgrim Church, are a community of both generosity and abundance. We are blessed as a congregation with both the gifts of our ancestors and the gifts of our present congregation, and I brag on this congregation regularly. Do you know that in 2020, we gave nearly 10% of our budget away? In 2020. But, I wonder, I imagine, what more we could do to make a better future for some of our neighbors in profound human need. From a place of abundance and blessing, how many more of our neighbors could we bless?

How would we turn ourselves toward that?

Calling includes a holy imagination about the future, and a belief that we can be part of it.

We often hear this story as a call to the church to evangelize for the sake of expanding our numbers - fishing for people.

I'm going to reinterpret a little here and play upon the English translation a bit. Jesus says he will make them fish for people. I wonder if we could take it to mean, when we are called to fish for people, we are called to fish on behalf of people. We are called to believe in a future when all people are treated with equity and dignity, a future when there is enough for everyone's basic needs, enough shelter, enough health care, enough food, enough joy. If we fish for people, that is to say if we fish for the benefit of people, what would the world look like?

Friends, on Wednesday I heard a call from poet Amanda Gorman - and I heard a vision of the future. She spoke of the US but I heard in her words a call to every individual and community. She preached this message far more beautifully than ever I could, so I'm going to turn the end of the sermon over to her words:

To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and
conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us...

Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promise to glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it

...

So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free

...

But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might,
and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy
and change our children's birthright
So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with

...

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the shade,
afraid and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it