**Sermon Sunday Morning Worship Jan. 21,2024** THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

**Gospel Reading: Mark 1:14-20**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 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. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

**Sermon**

In Advent, we read the first part of chapter one in Mark. I shared with you that Mark does not waste any time. He jumps right in. We are only in verse fourteen and the following four things have already taken place in Mark's Gospel:

- The beginning of the Gospel has been announced
- John is offering a baptism of repentance and forgiveness
- Jesus is baptized
- Jesus has spent forty days in the wilderness

This morning, Mark shares with us that John the Baptist has been arrested. However, he does not share with us the how or why. However, we are going through Mark during Year B, so come back on July 14th and you can hear the story behind his arrest. Now, hopefully, I will see you a few times before that date.

I am not going to spend much time talking about the transition from John to Jesus, but I do think that it might be beneficial for us to ponder the timing. Jesus does not

move into his public ministry until John is forcibly removed from his prophetic ministry. It seems like Jesus is not wanting to compete with him and that there is a component of patient time fullness. Whatever the case may be Jesus now steps into the spotlight, per se.

Today, it is about the invitation, and we see Jesus inviting four individuals to come along on this wild journey. They have no clue what the details of the journey will be, yet they do not hesitate. They say yes and they drop everything and follow Jesus. Maybe, it is good for us to remember that the four individuals that Jesus invited to join his cause were fisherman. Fisherman had a reputation for being rugged. They were a little rough around the edges. The job that they held was physically demanding and very difficult. The first group of individuals that Jesus invites are ordinary-hard working people. He wanted them beside him to be his friend, companion and colaborers in spreading the good news.

It always amazes me that Christ often interrupts an ordinary mode of existence. In our bible study on Tuesday, we spent a few minutes imagining what would happen if Jesus came to us on Thursday at 10:30 in the morning and called us out and asked us to join him on his adventure. The call at that time would interrupt the ordinary mode that we are in. For some of our study members, they would be hearing that call while they were doing laundry or spending time at the library. What would we do if Jesus came calling?

There is also another level to the invitation. Not only are we called to follow Jesus, but we are also called to invite others to follow Jesus. We saw a glimpse of that last week when Philip went and invited Nathaniel to come with him and join the cause.

In our study, we also talked about Jesus and his invitation. The study group believed that he must have been head and shoulders above everyone else because

the crowds were always amazed and were willing to follow. I pondered those comments and words after the study and was wondering if there was something in those statements that could be used as a springboard.

In the text, we are not really given any guidance. We are not given the privilege of knowing the tone that Jesus uses. When you hear his invitation, how do you hear it? Do you hear the invite as a

- Authoritative Command
- Gentle Invitation
- Prophetic Call

In whatever manner it occurred, they followed. In their yes, they joined a movement that had been advance by the likes of Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, and John the Baptist. Throughout the Gospels, after the yes, they continue to walk with Jesus even with their doubts, questions, and their inability to comprehend what Jesus is truly saying and doing. They truly are walking by faith. Very early on, they realize that God's call is not without burden.

Speaking of burden, I want to make a subtle shift as I come to the second half of my sermon. The shift may also challenge some of our traditional thinking and translation of this story. Because of the unexpected challenge, I want to reach back into the Old Testament and share with you three scriptures that may be the foundation for the shift.

1) Jeremiah 16*: Now, watch for what comes next: I'm going to assemble a bunch of fishermen." God's Decree! "They'll go fishing for my people and pull them in for judgment.*

2) Amos 4: *The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.*
3) Ezekiel 29: *I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your channels stick to your scales. I will draw you up from your channels, with all the fish of your channels sticking to your scales.*

When we combine these three scriptures with the knowledge that in the bible the sea represents chaos where mythical enemies lurk, our minds can be opened up to ask some "*what if*" scenarios. Our minds could be opened up to the fact that fishing for people can mean rescuing people from the snares of the devil.

So, work with me for a little bit. If fishing for people involves walking towards chaos and snatching folks from the jaws of the devil; we can definitely see that it is challenging work. Too many times, I think we paint a rosy picture of Christianity and I understand. Inviting individuals to a pretty picture might make it a little easier.

Many times, we lean into the aspect that the purpose of Jesus call to discipleship is to take individuals out of the hostile world and promise them a glorious life in God's heavenly kingdom. Yet, this fishing analogy has the potential to turn everything upside down. But isn't that what Jesus does so often, flip things upside down.

Instead, maybe the call to discipleship is about changing the world in such a way that the world ceases to be a hostile place and it becomes a place where God's reign can be established on earth. Heaven on Earth could become a reality if we truly lived out the call to discipleship.

For this to happen, we will have to make a conscious effort to focus on the individuals who are poor, those who are deprived of property and those who are excluded because of their gender, sexual orientation, or race. There are still too many individuals in our society that have been rendered invisible. To make this happen, we have to have individuals who are willing to be risk-takers and denounce the evils that exist. Jesus' intent of discipleship and our 21st-century definition of discipleship is vastly different, in my view. Make no mistake, the transition is extremely difficult, and it is why we do not see many in our society drop everything and follow the vision of Jesus. The invitation to repent and head the other direction calls the hearer to a not-so-easy undertaking.

There has been much conversation at Bay View Lutheran, the Green Bay Conference which we are part of and then both at the synod and national level on dwindling numbers and participation among churches. It can be a little depressing and disheartening at times, but I do not believe that it has to be that way.

Please understand that it is very difficult. I sit in many meetings in our church and there are many conversations that occur about the lower attendance, mission boards and council positions that are vacant and the financial health of the congregation.

For a minute or two as I wrap up my sermon, I would like for us to set aside our preoccupation with how many butts are in our pews and how much cash is in our various accounts.

When I listen in to conversations, I often hear:

- We Need Greater Faith
- We Need Strong Commitment from Members
- We Need More Engagement

The list could probably grow; right?

However, today's Gospel lesson teaches us that Jesus began his ministry by calling out and inviting four rugged individuals to his team. In a short time, he invited eight more and they came onboard. Jesus and a crew of twelve changed the world.

In a short seven weeks, I am going to celebrate my third anniversary here and will be stepping into year four. I, as a pastor, have a choice. I could lament over those who are not here and the lack of participation in the ministry. Or I can celebrate, honor, respect and challenge those who are carrying on the vital ministry of Bay View.

Friends, I am not going to sugar-coat it, it has been a long and tough three years. At times, it seems like it has been one crisis after another. Yet, I have seen beautiful things occurring in this building and the community. I truly believe that great things can occur here at Bay View when we keep our eyes zeroed in on Jesus.

Today, I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you for all the time, talent, and treasures that you have poured into this community. Each and every one of you has been blessed with a gift. We are one body and I want to encourage you to be introspective. Look deep inside you and see where you can use the gift that God has blessed you with. We can make a difference and share the Good News of Jesus and we can be a crucial part of building up the Kingdom of God. **AMEN.**