

## Invitation

10th Sunday after Pentecost – August 8, 2004

### Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passage (NRSV)

Mark 1:9-15

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>12</sup>And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on 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.”

<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.

Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

*The St. Andrew vision statement calls us to “invite people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and one another . . .” Today, we begin a new sermon series on this invitation. We’ll approach this by learning about a four-fold understanding of Jesus’ ministry – Invitation, Welcome, Challenge, and Summons – as a guide to hearing our own call to ministry.*

*Invitation, Welcome, Challenge, Summons*

When it comes to Jesus, many Christians know scattered bits and pieces about him and his ministry, but lack any way to tie it together. Why did he eat with tax collectors? What’s with all the parables? What do we make of the healings? How do we begin to make sense of Jesus’ teachings and actions? N.T. Wright offers us a valuable four-fold understanding of Jesus’ ministry that can guide our own calling as

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Here you have it. If you are looking for a one-sentence description of Jesus’ ministry, this is it. These are the first words Jesus speaks in Mark’s gospel. So let’s take a closer look at them.

The time is fulfilled For centuries, the Jews had labored under foreign rule that was often brutal. They waited with great hope and anticipation for the day when God would again rule, when God’s kingdom would come, when all the world would see that YHWH is God. Jesus’ announces that their waiting is over – the time has come!

The kingdom of God has come near Jesus announces that, yes!, God’s rule is about to burst upon them; the story is coming to a climax. God will again be king. There will be no room for Caesar or any other pretenders to lordship. There will be only one Lord (and it will turn out to be Jesus!).

Repent Jesus is not inviting his fellow Jews to join some sort of social club. Rather, he invites them to recognize and to regret that they have been wrong-headed in their approach to being God’s people. Jesus invites them to abandon their own agendas and follow his. This is not about simply being sorry for what they did; Jesus calls them to turn 180° and take a new path.

Believe in the good news The word “believe” can throw us off here; it makes it all seem too intellectual. Instead, Jesus speaks here of trust, of embracing Jesus and his proclamation with our whole being. The good news is that Jesus is Lord, not anyone or anything else. Our loyalty and devotion must lie with Jesus.

Jesus' disciples.<sup>1</sup> In these four simple words – invitation, welcome, challenge, summons – we can find our way to the heart of Jesus' ministry and his announcement that the “kingdom of God has come near.”

### *Follow me*

Jesus' invitation was, and is, straightforward. Paraphrased, it goes something like this: “Stop walking away from God. Abandon the fruitless path you've been on. Turn right around and follow me! Trust me, trust that I am the Lord.” This is not an invitation to join a social club, a service agency, or a political party. It is an invitation to give up all of our own agendas and to embrace God's agenda; to forsake our way and to pursue God's way. It is an invitation to recognize and accept the truth that we are neither the masters of our fates nor the captains of our souls.<sup>2</sup>

The word “follow” is used dozens of times in the NT. Yet, when telling us of Jesus' invitation to Simon and Andrew, Mark uses a Greek word that is never used elsewhere in the same way. It literally means “come after” or “go after.” In the OT, “going after” God is always about obedience. Jesus is not simply inviting Simon and Andrew to follow him down the beach, he is demanding

total commitment. There can be no turning back. This is a call for total allegiance. Jesus' disciples are called to a life of obedience, self-denial, and sacrificial love.

All this ought to help us grasp that Jesus' invitation, though straightforward, is profound and demanding. This seems only fitting for an invitation to join God's family.

### *Invited to join a new family*

When we say yes to Jesus' invitation, we join a new family. If we bring to mind all that is good about the families into which we are first born, we can begin to imagine the hope and love and promise of the family into which we have been reborn, the family of God.

Jesus knew that his disciples would find it pretty hard to grasp this business about a new family, a family that demanded his disciples' primary allegiance. Once, while Jesus' mother and brothers waited to see him, Jesus said “Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33-35). A crucial truth of our faith is that when we gaze around the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, we are looking at more than friends and neighbors, they are family!

Though our invitation to others might begin with a simple invitation to visit St. Andrew, we ought to bear in mind that the invitation Jesus extends is life-changing, touching every part of our lives, our minds, our hearts, and our hands.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Sometimes referred to as The Great Invitation, this is one of the most familiar verses in the New Testament. Who among us has not been weary and carried heavy burdens. Though such burdens are characteristic of human existence, Jesus is not talking about being burdened by work, illness, or even sin. Rather, he is talking to his fellow Jews about the burdens imposed by the law.

Of course, as soon as we start talking about “the law,” we tend to dismiss it as being very “Old Testament,” having little to do with us. But we could hardly be more wrong. Humans, then and now, are drawn to rule-making. We are quick to burden ourselves with lists of do's and don'ts. We may sincerely desire to live in a way that is pleasing to God, but Jesus knows that our lists of right behavior are self-defeating. It is not that Jesus did away with the law. Sometimes he was more stringent (divorce), at others he was more lenient (observing the Sabbath). But he did urge us toward true fulfillment of the law. Rather than rules, Jesus emphasized love of God and love of neighbor, pointing God's people to justice, mercy, and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

1. from Douglas Hare's commentary on Matthew in the *Interpretation* series.

<sup>1</sup>Bishop Wright has written a lay treatment of his scholarly work on Jesus: *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering who Jesus was and is*, InterVarsity Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>These phrases are from William Henley's stirring poem, “Invictus.” This poem was one of my favorites until I came to understand that it is a portrait of an unrepentant person, shaking his or her fist at “whatever gods may be.” I think that Jesus would wrap his arms around this person, inviting her to find rest and unburden herself of her defiant anger. If you google “Invictus,” you'll easily pull up the full text of the poem.

## Daily Bible Readings

*(more invitations)*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Genesis 6:11-22 God's invitation to Noah</p>	<p>Day 2 Exodus 3 God's invitation to Moses</p>
<p>Day 3 Isaiah 2:2-4 God's invitation to all the nations, written about 700 years before Jesus.</p>	<p>Day 4 John 1:35-51 Jesus' invitation to Andrew and others. Note what Andrew does after meeting Jesus for the first time!</p>
<p>Day 5 Luke 14:1-24 The invitation and humility; Jesus' parable of the great dinner</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

## Sermon Notes

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### August Book Recommendation

*The Bible Makes Sense*, by Walter Brueggemann

In keeping with today's Scripture passage of "solid food," this book is probably the best introduction to Brueggemann, one of today's leading Old Testament scholars and teachers. This is a brief volume suitable for individuals and groups, with questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter. Brueggemann wants us to learn to read the Bible as an "insider," to see life from a biblical perspective. Think of this book as a road map into the strange world of the Bible. He helps us to use our imaginations and to see the Bible as more than a newspaper-like account of the past. Scripture is God's Word and the spiritual journal of God's people.

Available now at *Inspiration*, the St. Andrew bookstore

**The final "Fruit of the Spirit" evening lecture, *Peace*, will be this Tuesday, August 10, at 7pm in Piro Hall with Cecil Taylor.**

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In Mark's gospel, Jesus' first public statement challenges listeners to "repent, and believe in the good news." What do you think he means by "repent?" How do you respond when you hear the word "repent?" What might this mean in your own life? What agenda do we really follow? Who sets our priorities? What is the good news in which we are called to believe? If it is truly a proclamation that Jesus is Lord, how would this change the priorities in your life?
2. Take a few moments and read Jesus' parable of the great dinner in Luke 14:15-25. In the parable, who is the host for the dinner? Who are the invited guests? Why might all these people have made excuses for not coming to the dinner? Does the host invite them again? What do you think of the host's idea to invite the needy?! Why do you think Jesus told this parable? What point is he trying to make? Why did he use a parable to make his point?
3. Whom does God invite to his banquet? To what sort of life does he invite them? Is there an RSVP? How should we explain this invitation to others? What is involved in our acceptance of the invitation? Who moves us to accept this invitation?