

Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)

¹⁴Now after John [the Baptist] 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.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—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.

John 6:1-15 (NRSV)

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Invite. Invite. Invite.

This is where it all begins.

Can you believe it? It is nearly time for our schools to get going again. Hopefully, this fall will be a big improvement over last fall. This is also the time when we at St. Andrew especially turn our hearts and minds to inviting and welcoming others to this warm, engaging, committed corner of Christ’s body. In this, we are doing no more than following the lead of our namesake, Andrew.

The invitation

In the space of just a few sentences, Mark tells us of Jesus’ bold invitation. In the first pronouncement of his public ministry, Jesus calls on the people to “*repent, and believe in the good news.*” Usually, we think of repentance as merely being sorry for what we did and see Jesus’ invitation as no more than a call to mend our sinful ways. But Jesus invites us to a much more profound understanding of repentance. In Jesus’ day, the Greek word we translate “repent” had political connotations. In essence, Jesus is calling on hearers to give up their agenda, even their way of being God’s people, and embrace Jesus’ agenda, Jesus’ aims, Jesus’ way of being the people of God. Jesus called on them

to believe the good news, to believe these words of proclamation that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar – Jesus!¹

In Mark's gospel, we hardly have time to catch our breath after hearing Jesus' first challenging invitation before Mark takes us to the seashore, where Jesus approaches Simon and Andrew and says "*follow me and I will make you fish for people.*" Note that

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."
(Matt. 11:28)

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.¹

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

Jesus doesn't say "follow God," rather he says, "follow me." Looking back from our day, we can see in Jesus' invitation to follow him, a hint as to Jesus' true nature and vocation. With the benefit of hindsight, we understand that Jesus' invitation to follow him *is* an invitation from God. Indeed, Jesus' invitation to Simon and Andrew and James and John parallels God's invitation to Abraham nearly 2000 years before. God had invited Abraham to "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). God's invitation, accepted by Abraham, forever changed his life, the lives of his descendants and all peoples, just as did the invitation accepted by Simon and Andrew!

"Follow me"

Though there are dozens of uses of the word "follow" in the New Testament (e.g., "whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" [Matt 10:38]), when telling us of Jesus' first invitation to Simon and Andrew, both Matthew and Mark use a Greek construction never used elsewhere in the same way, *deute + opiso*, literally, "come after." Their choice of words is profoundly theological. *Opiso* means "behind" or "after," as in going after God. As Kittel² notes, in the Old Testament, going after God means obedience! Hence, Jesus is not simply inviting Simon and Andrew to follow him, he is demanding total commitment. There can be no turning

back. This is a call for total allegiance. Jesus' disciples will be called to a life of obedience, self-denial, and sacrificial love. Jesus' opponents saw this. Indeed, the Pharisees would complain that the people had "gone after" (*opiso*) Jesus (John 12:19). Paul also understood that he was abandoning his old life for a life of total commitment to Christ when he wrote "Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it on my own: but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind (*opiso!*) and straining forward to what

¹ The Greek word translated "good news" is *evangelion*. In the Roman world of Jesus' day, this was a word used to proclaim the birth of the emperor's heir, the enthroning of a new emperor, and a great military victory. This proclamation, the *evangelion*, would be carried out to the provinces by messengers and heralds. The good news of Jesus is a proclamation that Jesus is Lord, in direct challenge to the proclamations of Caesar.

² From Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged and translated by G. Bromily)

lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13).

Clearly, Matthew and Mark want us to comprehend that Jesus’ invitation to Simon and Andrew, indeed to all those wishing to follow him, is a profoundly life-changing invitation every bit as challenging as God’s invitation to Abraham that he leave all he knows and embark on a journey to an unknown land that will be shown to him by God. Also, like the invitation to Abraham, Jesus’ invitations to Simon and Andrew seem to be less like requests and more like commands. As Jesus’ parable of the great dinner (Luke 14:15-24) tells us, such invitations can be rejected only at great peril.

Andrew reaches out to another

On the surface, this miracle story is pretty simple. Jesus has crossed over the Sea of Galilee to a northern shore where a large crowd awaits him. When he sees the size of the crowds, Jesus asks Philip how the people are to be fed. Philip replies that they certainly don’t have the money to feed them when Andrew walks up with a boy right behind him. Andrew tells Jesus that the boy has five loaves of barley bread and two fish . . . enough only for a few.

So why does Andrew bring the boy to Jesus? What does he imagine Jesus will do with a few loaves and a couple of fish? Perhaps Andrew already understands that Jesus is all about possibilities, not limitations. He is ready to entrust this to Jesus, just as he has entrusted all else to him. So Jesus takes the loaves and fish, blesses them, and then distributes them. Miraculously, there is enough to feed fifteen or twenty thousand people. Everyone got all they wanted and more.

But we would be mistaken if we understood this story to be about no more than Jesus’ astounding powers. Instead, this is a profoundly rich story that taps into the very core of the Christian faith. There is more going on than we can do justice to in this brief study, but here are a few keys:

- John notes that this miracle happened during Passover, which celebrates the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt. Thus, John introduces the theme of the Exodus and God’s provision for his people which figures so prominently in this chapter.
- Jesus knows what he is going to do to feed the crowds, but he wants to know if Philip, Andrew, and the other of his close disciples know. Have they begun to grasp the source of Jesus’ power and, hence, his identity? Perhaps Andrew has, at least a bit. Throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, even his closest disciples have great difficulty truly grasping whom it is that they follow.
- John’s Gospel was written late in the first century. The Christian community had shared the Lord’s Supper, the eucharist³, for decades. Jesus’ taking of the bread, giving thanks, and distributing it is clearly evocative of the sacred meal shared by all Christians.
- Just as Moses instructed the people to pick up all the manna, Jesus makes sure that all the uneaten fragments are gathered up. Truly, God not only provides for our most basic needs (like food) but does so to overflowing. And it is not an accident that there are twelve baskets filled with the leftovers, for twelve tribes constituted the people of God.

Andrew – the passionate doer

Many years ago, Leo Buscaglia wrote an oddly named book, *Bus 9 to Paradise*. It was a book about passion. His premise was simple. To lead fulfilling and happy lives, he said,

³ Though in Methodism we don’t often use the word “eucharist” to denote the Lord’s Supper, it comes from the Greek word *euchariseo* meaning “giving thanks.” John uses it in v. 5 when Jesus gives thanks over the loaves.

we need a passion, something that gets us up every morning excited to discover what the new day holds. For Buscaglia, it wasn't important what we are passionate about, only that we have a passion in life. We could go from one passion to another. The nature of the passion was not the point, nor its endurance – it was simply having one.

I've always thought there was a lot of truth in Buscaglia's premise. Passion turns the world from black-and-white into full, living color. It is like the moment when Dorothy steps out of her house into Oz. Or the movie, *Pleasantville*, if you remember it.

What does Andrew do when he first meets Jesus? He runs to get his brother. Now, in the face of hungry crowds, he had hurriedly brought a young boy to Jesus. Again, I picture Andrew being the passionate doer, always ready to press ahead, to get things done.

I don't know if you have passions in your life, but here's the question for us all. Do we have a genuine passion for Jesus? Yes, we are Christians; but are we *passionate* Christians? We are disciples, but are we *passionate* disciples? Are we *passionate* believers? Are we *passionate* servants of our Lord?

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

A study of 1 Peter

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

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