

Mark 3:13-19 15th April 2018

I have a pastoral concern for the well being of our church family, I will start the sermon with a joke...

Richard, do you remember? What will happen on Sunday June the 17th?

Germany vs. Mexico

So I feel the need to be able to joke about Germany otherwise the excitement and tension will be too much and I am worried that we will not like each other anymore!

joke

Just in case Germany wins, you can make fun of the German accent...

So let's pray to prepare ourselves and to be ready to listen to what God is saying to us through this text.

Would anyone be willing to pray?

Richard parked the sermon series on Mark before Easter talking about how the religious leaders had made up their mind to kill Jesus.

Well, that is one way to respond to Jesus.

When we looked at the passion narrative from the Gospel of Mark as we prepared for Easter we realized that betraying Jesus is also an option.

Jesus has been presented to us by Mark up to this point in ch. 3 as one who has the power to forgive sins, to heal the sick and free the captive.

In all these stories so far, the audience was wide.

Starting in our passage today, Jesus focuses his teaching on those who follow Him and other particular groups.

Through these stories, Mark raises the question "How do people respond to Jesus?"

In the passage for today, Jesus engages His disciples.

Mark's purpose is to engage us as readers by confronting us with this question: "what is your response to Jesus?"

Mark says in v. 13 that Jesus “went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted.”

It almost sounds like there are others who are not called because Jesus does not want them. This sentence seems really awkward.

However, Mark’s choice of words is intentional because he wants to communicate a message.

Mark is not trying to say that Jesus only wanted the twelve to follow Him.

So what is it that Mark is trying to communicate with this passage?

Let’s start by asking “What is the significance of these names?”

Most of these people listed in this passage by name are unknown to us.

A few of them are mentioned in Acts as having taken on leadership in the early Jesus movement.

But most of them are not major figures in the church, people like you and me.

This list of names points us to the truth that the church exists because of and for people who more often than not remain unknown. The church is not about stars and celebrities.

The names also indicate that Jesus’ disciples came from diverse backgrounds.

Why are they together? What unites them?

On the one end of the spectrum we have Matthew who collaborated with the hated Romans and on the other end of the spectrum there is Simon the Zealot who is committed to war against Rome.

The only thing that brings them together is Jesus’ call. Their personal commitments would pull them in opposite directions.

But Jesus call to be with Him and to go out to proclaim the Good News to others, That’s brings them together.

Imagine, What would happen today if a fundamentalist American who thinks that Trump is a gift from God and believes that homosexuality is the greatest sin of all times would be part of the same church family as a liberal Anglican from Canada who thinks that Trump is the reincarnation of the devil and who

believes that in order to be the church we need to have rainbow flags everywhere.

Mark wants to emphasize the essential significance of Jesus' call for anyone's existence as a follower of Jesus.

What is it that shapes our lives as Christians? Our own commitments or Jesus' call to follow Him?

I wonder if it is so hard for us to imagine this fundamentalist American and this liberal Anglican from Canada to be part of one and the same church family because it is our commitments that shape our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus rather than the other way around.

Are your commitments and values shaped by Jesus' call to follow Him or do you let your values and commitments shape your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?

Following Jesus is not one option or possibility among others from which we choose.

Instead, following Jesus is the desired response to Jesus' call. But we cannot decide ourselves to follow Jesus without obedience to Jesus' call.

This is important for the following reasons:

Bonhoeffer puts it this way: "There are those who offer themselves to follow Jesus but in doing so claim the right to place conditions on what it means for them to follow Jesus."

Bonhoeffer concludes that "Faithfully following Jesus does not tolerate conditions that get in between Jesus' call and our obedience."

Only Jesus' call makes it possible for us to be people who follow Jesus.

Perhaps you have some doubts about Jesus. Perhaps you have a hard time saying the creeds or believing that the miracles recorded in Scripture actually happened.

Following Jesus is not about agreeing with certain propositional truth claims.

Again, Bonhoeffer reminds us: "The journey to faith happens through obedience to Jesus' call."

We do not first believe and then decide if we want to obey or not. There is no such thing as faith without obedience!

The Good News is that Jesus is alive today and He is actively speaking to us and calling us.

It is this activity of God, this calling and inviting, that makes reading Scripture exciting.

Like the first twelve disciples, we are called into a new community. I don't think it is a coincidence that Mark uses the same word that is also used in Gen 1:1.

Mark writes: <sup>14</sup> And he **appointed** twelve, whom he also named apostles."

The translation appointed is misleading. It is the same verb used in the Greek OT in Gen 1:1

Just like Gen 1:1 says "in the beginning God **made** heaven and earth," so also God **made** the twelve, This passage is about a community made by Jesus.

In other words, what Mark is communicating is that Jesus called a new community into existence. And we are part of this community today!!!

You might say that this connection to Genesis is not intentional but I think it is because there is more:

Again, Mark 3:14: <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve, whom he also **named** apostles."

Can you think of someone in the creation account from Genesis that named something?

In order to reinforce the creation theme, Mark writes that Jesus **named** the Twelve just like Adam **named** the animals as recorded in Genesis ch. 2.

Mark wants to communicate that by calling the twelve Jesus creates something new.

the twelve are the beginning of a new community. And those who follow Jesus today are members of the same community!

The twelve are the beginning of a new community, not the goal, This new community called into existence by Jesus is not yet complete!

Also, The Twelve are not ideal followers of Jesus. they are representatives, so when we read about the twelve disciples or the apostles, they are like us called into this new community of which Jesus is the head and Lord.

If you are wondering why there are only men, it is because the Twelve very often serve as a negative example.

In contrast, throughout the Gospel of Mark, it is women who are presented to us as positive examples for what it means to follow Jesus.

Women are with Jesus under the cross when He dies and women are the first witnesses to the resurrection.

All this to say that Jesus' call is not just addressed to the Twelve way back then but also directed at all of us today.

Mark further describes this call in v. 14: <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles,<sup>[a]</sup> to be with him, and to be sent out.

To be called by Jesus is to be invited to be with Him and to be sent out.

To be called by Jesus is about spending time in the presence of Jesus.

When have you last spend some enjoyable time with Jesus? If Richard would try and say the same as Mark, he would write that Jesus would like to have a coffee with you at Juniper. Jesus invites you to sit with Him.

The Psalmist puts it this way in Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God!"

Jesus invites you to come to Him, He calls you to spend time in His presence and as those who have been called and embraced by God, are also being sent out to invite others into this new community of followers of Jesus.

Jesus calls us into this new community but Jesus' call also singles you out because He calls you and only you yourself can respond to this call directed at you.

Bonhoeffer "Christ singles you out because He wants you to see the One who calls alone."

Everyone enters into the journey of following Jesus alone. Each one of us has to respond to Jesus call by themselves.

But no one remains alone because the life of those who respond to Jesus' call are invited to be with Jesus.

This is really exciting because if you are with Jesus and if I am with Jesus then we are together in this new community of followers of Jesus.

And, it is quite the community!

Looking at the sample that Mark has given us, we have already noticed that the community made up of followers of Jesus is diverse.

In addition, it is not a utopian society!

It would have made a lot of sense to drop Judas' name because why would you include someone in this list who betrayed Jesus?

I thought this is a community of people who follow Jesus. So how does Judas even fit?

We are not part of this community based on what we do for Jesus or how well we live our lives.

Following Jesus is not about what we can do for God but about what Jesus does with, in, and through us!

Here is another quote, sorry,

"Discipleship does not consist in what disciples can do for Christ, but in what Christ can make of disciples."

So in response to Jesus' call, arguments like "I am too old, or, I don't know enough, or, I am too young, or anything like that" are invalid precisely because following Jesus is about what Jesus can accomplish with us and not about what we can accomplish for Him.

The presence of Judas' name in this list reminds us that God will accomplish his purposes despite our failures and weakness, and perhaps, sometimes God may even work through our failures and weakness.

So again, the community created by Jesus' call is not determined by our preferences or abilities.

Instead, it is Jesus' call, and Jesus' call alone, that establishes this new community.

Perhaps this almost sounds like our integrity as responsible human beings is undermined by the significance of Jesus call.

However, when understood in the right context, the importance of Jesus' call for our existence as followers of Jesus is actually Good News!

Listen to this **story or letter**. It is fiction, but it will help us understand the significance of Jesus' call and how the grace of his call puts our strength and weakness into proper perspective.

So this fictional letter is written to:

Jesus, Son of Joseph

Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop Nazareth

FROM:

Jordan Management Consultants Jerusalem

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept.

We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of

Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants.

Jesus calls each one of us and His call puts our abilities, or the lack thereof, into perspective!

You might think that you have nothing to offer to Jesus,

you might think that you are not good enough to be a follower of Jesus,

you might believe all kinds of lies about yourself.

The Good News is that Jesus comes to us and calls us to follow Him, wherever we are, and whatever we may have done or thought in the past.

Jesus' call frees us and invites us into a new existence.

As Bonhoeffer puts it

"Jesus' call to follow Him frees us from all bonds for the benefit of our bonding to Jesus Christ."

I pointed out earlier that Mark's purpose with the text that we have read for today is to engage us as readers by confronting us with this question: "what is your response to Jesus?"

Jesus' call to follow Him frees us from other bonds so that we are free to embrace Jesus.

May God give us the grace to stop placing conditions on what it means to follow Jesus.

And may we grow in our awareness and understanding that Jesus has invited to be with Him and to go out and invite others into this new community. Thanks be to God for calling us into this new community!

Amen