

Third Sunday After Epiphany, Year B  
Mark 1:14-20

There is a command in the Parenting 101 Instruction Book that most of us remember hearing as children.

If we have children, it's a command most of us have used on them.

If we have a dog it's a command we give at those times when we assume that they understand every word we say.

Can you guess what it is?

"You come when I call."

Most of us have heard it.

Most of us have said it.

"You come when I call."

As the parent of a grown adult, I don't use that command anymore, but I sure used to.

We don't have a dog now.

Our last dog was a recalcitrant Dalmatian named Pete.

To those of you who bear that name, I want to say that he was named when we got him.

When we had Pete, I used that command.

Pete would ask to go out, and off he'd go.

When I thought he'd been out there long enough, I'd open the back door and call his name.

And as often as not, he wouldn't appear.

Jane used to swear that the trick was to clap your hands twice as you were calling his name, but I was never able to gather any data to support her claim.

So, I would start to call louder and I would feel exasperated because it felt as if my authority was being questioned.

I'd think he was roaming around out there thinking, "Blah, blah, blah."

I could imagine him looking back at me over his shoulder and thinking, "Right, Steve, you just hang there for a few more minutes.

I'm going to get myself right over there — when I'm good and ready."

By now you might be thinking, "Man this guy is really up-tight.

Why couldn't he let the dog stay there as long as he wanted?"

Well, the answer is that when Pete stayed out there too long he could get into some pretty creative mischief.

For example, he once ate so many loquats that he poisoned himself with the arsenic in the pits, and we won't even talk about the drip irrigation destruction.

Besides, who's the boss?

So, I must have said it hundreds of times, "You come when I call."

This morning's Gospel Reading is about being called.

Let me set the stage for the story we just heard.

In the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel, we read about John the Baptist preparing the way and foretelling the arrival of Jesus.

And Jesus did arrive and was baptized by John in the Jordan River.

Right after the baptism Jesus was driven into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted and tested by Satan.

And now, in today's passage at the end of the forty days, John has been arrested and Jesus has returned to Galilee to begin his public ministry.

These are the first words we hear him say, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

I don't know what you think of when you hear those words, but last week when I was reading them two other words came to my mind.

"Let's roll."

Do you recognize those words?

Those were the words Todd Beamer said shortly before United Airlines flight 93 crashed into a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania on the morning of September 11th, 2001.

"Let's roll."

Those words were heard by a telephone operator through an open line, and I don't if that operator heard fear or resignation or desperation in those words, but that's not what I hear when I try to hear them in the context in which they were spoken.

I hear resolve and firm determination

"It's time, let's do it."

That's what I hear in Jesus, too.

“It’s time, let’s do it.”

After Jesus had spoken and launched his active ministry, Mark tells us that as he was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, fishing, and he called out to them and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And Mark reports that immediately Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus.

Immediately.

It’s a word you find again and again in Mark’s Gospel.

Mark used that word as if to convey a sense of urgency about the story he was telling.

It gets used again in Jesus’ next encounter farther down the beach.

Mark says that Jesus saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, mending their fishing nets in their boat, and he writes that immediately Jesus called them, “and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.”

Immediately.

There is something urgent about what has begun, and what has begun cannot be delayed.

It’s likely that Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John had heard of Jesus, or that they might already have seen him or even known him, but that doesn’t diminish the magnitude of how they responded when Jesus called.

They dropped everything and left to follow.

And they left a lot.

All four of these men left good jobs.

Fishing in the Sea of Galilee provided for a comfortable living and steady work.

We read later in this same chapter that Simon and Andrew owned a home that was big enough to accommodate an extended family, and we remember from the story that James and John left their father in the boat with the hired men.

They may not have been rich, but these men were comfortable, and theirs was a livelihood that may have been handed down for generations.

So we know that responding to the call of Jesus meant leaving some things, and I think we can imagine that some of those things weren't easy to leave.

Responding to the call also meant being changed, and I don't mean changed just in the externals, how they spent their days, or where they are and slept.

I mean changed dramatically, constitutionally, in who they were.

It may not have happened right away, and we may joke about how slow they were, and about how they never seemed to catch on, but these are people who were profoundly changed, and you and I are in this church, you and I are the church, today because of that change. After the Resurrection of Jesus this unlikely, rag-tag little band of followers became the zealous evangelists who saw to it that the story of Jesus was spread throughout the world.

We are here today because of the ways in which they were changed. And what a great day to be in this place and to hear this story about call and response, the day of our Annual Parish Meeting.

When we finish the 10 o'clock (this) liturgy today we will convene to conduct our annual family gathering.

We will talk about parish finances, we will elect new vestry members and diocesan convention delegates and alternates.

We will say thank you to some people who have worked tirelessly in one trench or another this past year for the life and mission of St. James.

In all of what we will do in this church today, as we worship, and as conduct the business of our parish, Jesus will be saying, "Follow me. Follow me. Please, follow me."

There are some other lines in the Parenting 101 Instruction Book that Jesus could be using.

He could be saying, "I don't want to have to call you one more time," or "Don't make me come over there and get you."

But he doesn't use those lines.

He does not threaten or whine or coerce.

He simply says, "Follow me," and it's not a command, it's an offer.

That's the beauty of this thing.

If we decide to follow, I mean truly to follow, there may be some things we have to leave or put off or sacrifice or give up or rearrange, but it won't be just for the good of the whole or the welfare of St. James or the support of the community.

It will be for ourselves, each one of us individually.

It will be to change ourselves from the inside out.

When that change takes place, amazing things will happen.

Reconciliation, healing, growth, peace, joy, and hope will abound.

So starting right now, listen to Jesus calling you, "Follow me, follow me."

Claim your discipleship, become a stakeholder in the life of this parish church, and remember, it isn't a command, it's an offer.

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