

## EMBRACE THE CALL!

Dear Friends in Christ:

As I was studying the Gospel of St. Mark last week, in preparation for today's sermon, all of a sudden my cat Brody jumped up and sprawled himself all over my desk, his head and paws resting on my Bible. Well, next thing I know, he shuffles his body, rolls around a little bit more and then extends his paws, pushing the Bible away and shoving it off my desk! Cat's love to do that, you know, push things off the table, the desk, the sink – just to let you know they're still in charge! My first instinct was to catch the Bible and then in feigned anger, retorted to the cat, *"Hey, don't you go pushing away the Word of God like that!"* Always a preacher, right – even if the audience is a feline friend!

But in that fun moment, attuned to the Holy Spirit's direction, today's sermon evolved, the thought immediately coming to mind: *"Wow, how often are people like that, pushing away the Word of God? How often am I like that – you like that – often pushing back when the message of the Bible gets too close and personal, infringing on our desire to be in charge?"* Through my cat, *[though I won't push this theology too far]* God was reminding me not to *"push back"* when Jesus proclaims in Scripture: *"The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."* It was a reminder to **"embrace the call"** whenever the Savior stands on seashore of life, beckoning and inviting: *"Come, follow me!"*

Certainly, what we witness in today's Gospel, when Jesus calls the first disciples is no hesitation, no pushback, no excuses and no delays, as Mark emphasizes: "*And immediately they left their nets and followed him!*" (Mark 1:18 ESV) Other translations read: "*At once*" (NIV) or "*they didn't ask questions,*" (MSG) and in the King James Version of the Bible, the text is rendered: "*And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.*" (KJV) I can recall hearing that classic old English word from childhood, probably spoken by one of my grandparents, "*Now you go straightaway child!*" And I knew there would be "*no pushback, no arguing, no delay, no tardiness, no detours, no 'in a minute' or 'let me do this first!'*" It was "*promptly, pronto and pdq*" (and I'm not talking chicken tenders) but "*right now, right away and right off.*" The fishermen "*immediately – at once - straightway*" **embraced the call** to follow Jesus!

Now, I think it's important for you to understand, in context, that when the first disciples they left their boats and nets and vocation and father to become "*fishers of men,*" this wasn't some wild tale of people blindly aligning themselves with the latest, greatest itinerant preacher or prophet or new age guru! No, other Scriptures tell us that Andrew had previously been hanging around with John the Baptizer and heard the proclamations: "*Prepare the way of the Lord*" and "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" In the other Gospels we learn that Andrew went and found his brother Simon (later to be named Peter) and said to him: "*We have found the Messiah*" (*which means Christ*). Before this Galilean call, they were longing for the fulfillment of all God's promises, and had actually spent the day with this One they called "*Rabbi*" and "*Teacher.*" How could they not **embrace the call** when Jesus interrupted the routine of daily life and work, extending the invitation: "*Come and see! Come, follow me?*" (John 1:23, 29, 35-41 ESV)

Were they fully prepared for the journey ahead? Surely not! Scripture reveals times of hesitation and pushback, sin and struggle, questioning and doubting, denial and betrayal! These were not super ready, always committed, never faltering, faithful and obedient followers! In fact, right after Jesus was betrayed and arrested, the shadow of Calvary's Cross looming, the Bible records, "*They all left him and fled!*" (Mark 14:50) They were sinners just like you and me, waiting and seeking, hoping and longing, imperfect and fearful but they found in Jesus a Savior who loved them, who called them, even though He knew them. They followed in faith and trust, surrendering in that moment to the higher call of the Messiah, the Son of God who declared: "*The time has come!*" He was calling them to life change, to pathways of discipleship and servanthood, empowering them through His life, death and resurrection to be witnesses to all the ends of the earth! "*And immediately they left their nets and followed him!*"

What a story, we might conclude, but my friends I want to tell you this Book we call the Bible is no "*story!*" It is not a novel, a work of fiction to be read once, placed on a shelf or table to gather dust, or taken across Rogers Road here to Mike's Used Books for exchange! No, this is the inspired revelation of God, the Holy Spirit calling every person – calling out to you and me - through the words of Christ to "*repent and believe the Gospel!*" This is the very Savior who came into the world for us at Christmas, "*the hopes and fears of all the years met in Him!*" This is the Christ, the Son of God, baptized by John to identify with us in every way; living the life we couldn't, dying on Calvary's Cross the death our sin deserved, rising on Easter morn to declare victory over sin, death and the devil, promising everlasting life to all who believe! Jesus is the Epiphany "*Light of the world*" who promises, "*whoever follows me will not*

*walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12) How can we not, saved by God’s grace through faith, **embrace the call**: “*Follow me?*”

It’s an important life question, because when Jesus declared: “*The time has come, or is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand,*” the Greek word used in this Biblical text for “*time*” is *kairos*, instead of *chronos*. *Chronos* has to do with chronology, days on a calendar or clock time. It’s the answer to the question: “*What time is it? This sermon certainly has been long and I’ve got lots of other things to do?*” *Kairos* time is different. It’s God ‘messin’ with you time; it’s critical time, the right time, the moment of truth time, a turning point time, and a decision time.<sup>1</sup> “*Will you follow me,*” Jesus asks? Will I make a difference in your life, and through you, a difference in the life of someone else? Will you **embrace the call**, or “push back” when my Word gets up close and too personal?

I know it’s not easy to be a follower of Christ – in fact it’s a day by day, one step at a time, growing in faith experience – just like it was for the first disciples. And that’s why we’re here today, spending a little more time with Jesus, gathering with other followers, confessing our sins, affirming our faith, encouraged by His Word, coming to the Holy Table so that forgiven and renewed by the Holy Spirit we depart with greater commitment, faith and courage, more ready to **embrace the call!**

And, what might that look like in your life and mine, responding to the call of Jesus: “*Follow me...?*” What is it that we must leave behind, quit doing, let go of so that Jesus can be the primary influencer of our thoughts, words and deeds? Perhaps our words become more forgiving and kind; less critical and more accepting of others? Perhaps we are less angry and

more patient; our actions highlighted by deeds of love and compassion; our giving more joyful and generous; our attitude uplifting and positive, characterized by faith, hope and trust, people wondering, *“What in the world has gotten into you? Such a change!”*

Perhaps this is the time to step up as a member of this church and say, *“Yes, I can do that,”* whether it’s folding clothes for Hope Chest or being bold in your personal witness, no longer following the crowd but living for Jesus, inviting friends or neighbors to *“come and see”* what God is doing as *“the people of Hope proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ!”* My hope and prayer is that *“immediately,”* when we leave this place; *“straightway”* when the worship is over; *“at once”* the service now begins! **EMBRACE THE CALL!**

**In the Name of Christ! AMEN.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Adapted from Mark 1:14-20; Series: Walk the Talk, Week 1. Walk Forward, The Rev. Douglas C. Hoglund, The Woodside Church, September 29, 2013*