

## Christ's Call: Drop Everything to Fish

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. after Epiphany – 01/21/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Mark 1:14-20 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 17-18, [Jesus said to two of His first called “pastors” and also two of the first “members” in the Christian Church.] **“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed Him.”**

### Introduction

- ✘ It's kind of our natural tendency to think of things in polar opposites: not this, but that; either/or; one not the other; this one bad, that one good; this one smaller, that one bigger.
  - ➔ Yes, most of the time, we think the same way when it comes to our choices and actions. Most of us, I would guess, remember sitting in science class when we learned about magnets. On one end of the magnet was a plus sign, and on the other end a minus sign. Not only are the signs different from each other, but the ends of the magnet react to metals in opposite ways. One end of the magnet draws the metal toward it, while the other end pushes the same metal away.
- ✘ Unfortunately, the two key teachings in God's holy Word; the Law and the Gospel are also often seen as two opposite, polarizing actions of God. But nothing could be further from the truth.
  - ➔ To be fair, the application of Law and of Gospel certainly feels different to us: the Law convicts us of our sins, and the Gospel frees us of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ.
  - ➔ But you see the feelings of constraint and then relief aren't what the forgiveness of sins is really all about. A more accurate way to understand this truth is that the Law is fulfilled by the Gospel; that is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. One prepares and the other fulfills – not one bad and the other good. It would be a blatant heresy to say that any teaching in God's Word is bad, because every bit of it has its own important role in how God assures us of our salvation and then fuels His Church.
- ✘ As an example, the ministry of John the Baptizer and the ministry of Jesus are sometimes seen as polar opposites – John fiery, scary and “mean!”; Jesus kind, loving and “nice!”
  - ➔ Yet our Gospel Reading today shows that John and Jesus are not polar opposites. Rather one of them – John, prepares human hearts and the other – Jesus, fulfills and completes God's work of saving human souls with a seamless transition of one to the other.
- ✘ So Mark shows us that the Gospel fulfills what the Law prepared; Jesus' call to His disciples (and to us) fulfills what John's call began.

### I. John's call to repentance

- ✘ Leading up to this Sunday, back in Advent, we heard the prophetic voice of John the Baptizer calling out of the wilderness to “make straight the way of the Lord” (Is. 40:3, Jn. 1:23).
  - ➔ Hopefully, you and I have also proclaimed the way of the Lord when we have lovingly, yet boldly shared the Law as John did. The Law; the undisputed truth of mankind's sin is the wind that broke the reeds of the self-righteous in John's day.
  - ➔ When we repentant of our sins today, our hearts and minds are then prepared for the Gospel to do its miraculous work. This repentance is not just a practice of our emotions, but it creates a thirst deep down in our hearts as if we were deep in the desert. And this thirst of our souls for rescue and relief is quenched by the baptismal waters that come with the Gospel of the coming Christ.

- ✘ Today's Old Testament Reading tells us about Jonah calling the wicked city of Nineveh to repentance in a way much like that of John the Baptizer. After Jonah's famous initial rebellion – punctuated by three days in the belly of that great fish – he did drop his pride and sin to follow God's call; to preach God's devastating Law to the city: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4). Fiery? Scary? Absolutely! But was it "mean"? Not at all!
- ✘ It is true with both Jonah and John the Baptizer that what they preached about God's wrath against sin is real. It must never be taken as just rhetorical speech.
  - ➔ None of us ought to feel so restful; so easy on this side of the cross and resurrection as to believe God's call to repentance is a false or unimportant narrative. It would be wrong to think that, because of Jesus we've been able to "get away with" our sins. No way, we have not "gotten away" with anything!
  - ➔ To think like that would be to misunderstand God's Law and Gospel as "bad" and "good". Far too many people, even within the Christian Church think that "Law = Bad = Getting caught red-handed" and "Gospel = Good = Not getting caught." That's just plain wrong! The fact is, whether we realize it or not, we are always caught red-handed by God. Yet God, through his spokesmen, proclaims and teaches the Law so that we will all be brought to an inward disgust over our own sins; so that we all should fully expect to be destroyed, because the full weight of the God's righteous Law is too much for us mere mortals.
  - ➔ The Gospel, however, as if it were a great Epiphany; a great "ah-hah!" each time that it happens, reveals to us that God's hammer, which we expected to be coming down against us because of our sin, isn't coming down upon us after all! Why? because it came down, with the Father's full wrath, on Jesus on the cross.
  - ➔ Just think friends, of the full weight of every dead-in-sin-and-damned soul on this earth laying on Jesus' shoulders until He died. And we now rise again with Jesus from the tomb in complete absolution from every single part of our guilt. The preparation Jonah and John laid down...that's what paved the way for Jesus to walk the Gospel on the road to the cross. The calls of these two prophets were actually God's call of deep concern for you; for me, because of your sins...and mine.

## II. Jesus' call to repentance and faith

- ✘ Now in our Gospel Reading today we see that Jesus followed up John's call for repentance with His own call for repentance. But there is a difference.
  - ➔ When Jesus comes onto the scene we must recall the journey that we've been through to arrive at this point. The angel announced to the shepherds out in the field watching their flocks at night, the good tidings of great joy. Jesus, the Christ had become one of us. He had been born of a virgin.
  - ➔ And now, as a grown man He begins His earthly ministry before us today by calling His first disciples. It's important to understand that these men – Simon and his brother Andrew, as well as James and his brother John were being called to be among the first Christian pastors and also the first members of the "Christ"ian Church. What unfolds here though is not God distancing Himself from the ministries of Jonah and John the Baptizer in their calls to repentance, but a continuation; a completion; a fulfillment of their ministries.
  - ➔ You see, there is an "and" that connects repentance to the one critical component for salvation that we have in Jesus' call that makes it stand out from both Jonah and John. Verses 14-15, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'".

- ✘ Here from Jesus, we have another call for repentance, but there are three important differences:
  - ➔ First, it may seem obvious, but this is the Son of God Himself doing the calling. His call to repentance therefore confirms and connects all other calls to repentance throughout history to Himself as God in the flesh.
  - ➔ Second, preceding the call to repentance is a phrase from Jesus that we will hear often in the Church Year to come. It is an everlasting promise from Yahweh: “the kingdom of God is at hand” (v. 15). Jesus even includes these words, “thy kingdom come,” in the prayer He taught His disciples and us. The kingdom of God, or more accurately from the Greek, “the reign of God” is the coming of Jesus the King in the flesh; both at His birth and when He comes again to judge the living and the dead.
  - ➔ And the third difference that follows Christ’s call to repentance is His Gospel promise and call to believe. Jesus said, “believe in the Gospel.” Here in Mark this is the first call toward faith from Jesus. This is no small thing, like “believe that I’m standing here in front of you.” No, this is, my friends, the most wonderful invitation ever to us, because it is the invitation that we receive God’s only way of rescue from death into life – today and into eternity; that we not only hear it, but that we believe it.

### III. Jesus’ call to pastors/Church fulfills His ministry

- ✘ But that is not the only call that we have from Jesus here today. Beginning with verse 16 we hear Jesus’ call to Simon, Andrew, James, and John; the call to “Drop Everything and Fish”. The great irony though is that when Jesus issues His call, these guys were already fishing, weren’t they? They were professional fisherman and yet both their career and their lifelong vocation was about to change to a different, far more difficult and yet infinitely more rewarding kind of fishing.
  - ➔ Jesus was calling them to be disciples; four of the first twelve men to occupy the Office of the Holy Ministry. Their new career would be what we think of as being a pastor today, but their lifelong vocation was now that of Christian. Together Jesus would make of them the brand new Christian Church. Their calling, by Jesus’ power and guidance after He had trained them for three years and had given His life for sin and had risen from the dead so that all believers would have eternal life, would be to continue Jesus’ ministry; to proclaim Jesus’ call to repentance and faith and to administer His sacramental gifts to all those who like them, responded in faith to the call to “Drop Everything to Fish”.
- ✘ That’s what the call to repentance and faith is all about still today for you and me, isn’t it? Whenever your soul or mine or that of someone else hears the truth of Jesus and all that He has done for our salvation, Jesus is saying to us, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (v. 17).
  - ➔ Think about the two parts of that call for a moment. When Jesus bids us to “follow” Him, it is by necessity both the call to repentance and to faith. After all, you can’t follow Jesus at the same time that you follow the trappings and desires and ideas of this earthly life. To “repent” literally means to “turn around”, away from sin. You can’t do both – they don’t mix. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” And to believe in Jesus, requires that He comes first in all things. Paul, in our Epistle Reading speaks of the importance that ours is an “undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:35). So we really do need to drop, or put aside any and all of the beliefs that our world wants us to embrace that are not in line with God’s Holy Word.

→ Why? because the ways of the world lead to condemnation and death, but the way which is Jesus is the way of life and truth. This is why Jesus calls all of us in His Church to be “fishers of men”, because He wants all of mankind to be with Him in eternal Paradise.

⊗ And God, in His eternal love and wisdom, wants you and me to have the joy of fishing for Him. He gives us everything we need to fish for the unbelieving souls of those around us. The “pole”, the “net”, the “bait” and more – all that is needed for an unbeliever to be “caught” by Jesus comes from Jesus, points to and connects a person to Jesus.

→ He’s given us His perfect and infallible Word in Scripture. That Word connected to the Water of Baptism, by the power of the Spirit is the means by which a newly repentant soul is brought into the saving “net” of God’s loving family. And once we are in God’s family, He feeds us His life-sustaining food in His Holy Supper to keep us fishing until our time on earth ends or Jesus returns on the Final Day.

## **Conclusion**

⊗ This is precisely where the ministry of John the Baptizer was always pointing; to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29), and beyond that to the ministry of Christ’s Church and His pastors still today.

→ Yes, Jesus’ own ministry is here among us, right now. We have the pure and unadulterated Gospel of our Lord Christ; the truth that the same sweet voice that cried from the manger in the recent Sundays of Christmas also called the disciples and His Church to proclaim the Law and Gospel to sinners in every age.

⊗ Just as Jonah and John called their hearers to repentance and pointed them to the promised Christ for forgiveness and life, so Jesus – the Messiah Himself calls us to repent and believe, and only He forgives us of our sins right now today.

→ That’s why He calls and places His pastors within His Church, to be Jesus’ physical spokesmen to proclaim His Law that breaks us and to speak His Gospel of forgiveness to restore and renew and reconcile us back to our loving Father forevermore. The pastor speaks the words, but they are Jesus’ words. He is the source, the power and completion of it all. So friends, when I proclaim Christ’s forgiveness to you, you can be sure today that you are forgiven and saved as if Jesus told you Himself. In the name of Jesus. Amen.