

Third Sunday in the Ordinary Time.

REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOOD NEWS: Mark 1:14-20

Like Last week's Gospel, today's Gospel is also about Jesus' calling of his first disciples. Last week remember he Called two, this Sunday we here his calling of his first Four disciples. It is about the first people who were called to hold the job which we as Baptized Christians hold today. Mark's story is not very elaborate. It is short and to the point. There is a certain note of adventure as the four men leave their fishing business to go with Jesus, but there is not much in the story that seems terribly upsetting. What the story doesn't tell about is what those men were getting in for by becoming followers of Jesus. To find out what was really in store for them, we have to keep reading. And what we discover is that being a disciple was not glamorous. In fact, it was downright dangerous.

Later in Mark we hear Jesus say, "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will find it." Matthew includes another comment: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Those are disturbing statements, especially for those of us who are today's disciples. He was saying that being his disciple is not an easy task. He was saying that the gospel is a disturbing force in the world which can upset individuals and nations alike.

It brings change and new experiences to all who hear it. Being his disciple will not be easy because the task of the disciple is to be the bearer of this revolutionary gospel message. We know what happened to Jesus. His message disturbed those in power and they tried to silence him. Of the four men in this gospel text, three were also executed for their witness. The powers that ruled the ancient world were upset by the gospel, and they tried to silence its voices. I'd like to be able to say that's all ancient history, but there are still governments today which oppose the gospel. It is important for us to realize that the truth of the gospel is like a two-edged sword: it is both comforting and disturbing. The messengers of this gospel may find themselves similarly regarded by those who don't want to hear that message, even in countries where Christianity is protected by law.

Jesus' two-edged sword also strikes close to home. I wonder what Peter's mother-in-law and wife had to say about his chasing off with an itinerant preacher. I wonder how old man Zebedee felt when his two sons simply picked up and left their half-mended nets in the boat. I suspect that the family relatives in this story were not too pleased. But that, too, is the nature of the gospel. It can upset individuals and disturb even family relationships. Jesus' call to service can be a call that provokes controversy and difficulty. I suspect that many folks see the gospel through rose-colored glasses -- wanting to see only the joy, comfort, and light and not wanting to see the difficult or disruptive. "Behold, I will make all things new," said Jesus. That's the other side of the two-edged sword.

There are two important words in today's gospel, one of which is the word repent! Too many folks think "repent" means to feel sorry for what you've done -- and then, go do it again. That's not it at all. "Repent" means to change direction. It means a change in priorities. It means living with a whole new approach to life! Repentance does not mean entering upon a guilt trip about your past, or your present. It means changing your life--your mind, your spirit, your attitudes, your behavior, your relationships, your punto de vista, your plans--long range and short term. It means coming to a new understanding of life's purpose and direction, and acting differently from now on. The graceful ability to change your mind and to change your behavior is the gift of God that we call repentance and faith. The meaning of the change of location is important, not just change for change's sake. The Prodigal son had also left his kinfolk, didn't he, and had taken his inheritance away with him and wasted it. That mere movement towards self-realization, towards independence, of cutting the apron strings, was without any blessed significance for his life. It was a life-changing event, but not a repentance. His real move towards wholeness began months later in the pig pen, when he said to himself, "I will get up and go home." So the disciples now make their graceful move by leaving their ordinary business, an honorable one, and their boats and nets, their relatives and families, and enter into discipleship.

Until we hopefully reach heaven where we will be perfect, there'll always be room for improvement, always some areas of our lives where we could be more fully dedicated to the kingdom.. **Amen**