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Sunday, January 21, 2018  
Third Sunday after Epiphany  
Text: Mark 1.14-20

Reading this passage of Mark always stirs up a sense of wonder and disbelief in how the disciples were called by Jesus. Mark's account pushes us forward very abruptly and urgently into the story of our Christ, so much so, that by the time we have come to our current passage for today, we are still in the first chapter and only 14 verses in, and John the Baptist has proclaimed a baptism of repentance and faith, Jesus is baptized, God proclaims this is my Son, Jesus has been tempted in the wilderness, and now, John is arrested, and Jesus is proclaiming the good news of God—"the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near"—he is calling to those who hear to repent and change their ways and to believe in the good news. And if that wasn't enough for us to take in, he's seemingly just walking along, sees some men fishing and tells them to leave it all behind and follow him. And guess what? They do. Immediately. Without question.

Unbelievable.

I mean unbelievable in a sense, that when I reflect on my own call to follow Christ it's been a series of pushing, pulling, and sometimes down right dragging me into the places I am so quick resist. Mainly my personal resistance is due to fear of failure and uncertainty. Can anyone else relate to maybe some fear and uncertainty in their daily call to follow Christ?

And we'll find that we're not alone as we continue to journey through the gospel of Mark because the disciples most certainly *don't always* have this quick response to follow Christ and they definitely *don't always* grasp what that means. There's many points of confusion and disbelief, but here, right now, today, they are giving us the courageous example of what it means to respond to the urgency of God's kingdom among them. Among us.

And as we hear Jesus' words to Simon (aka Peter) and Andrew, then James and John to come and follow him, we realize that following him came with a cost of leaving family, jobs, homes, and other unknown comforts in their lives. And yet, they were compelled to go and abandon what appears to be all regard for cultural norms.

It is the same assurance that lies within the words of Coretta Scott King, the wife of Martin Luther King Jr, in one of her speeches about life with MLK she says, "When God calls you to a great task, He provides you with the strength to accomplish what He has called you to do. Faith and prayer, family and friends, were always available when I needed them. Of course Martin and I were always there for each other. I learned that when you are willing to sacrifice for a great cause you will never be alone because you will have divine companionship and the support of good people." She found despite the real and present danger she and her husband faced, that following Jesus meant taking a risk that was worth taking because it meant redemption in a true tangible way that so

many of us are hoping for even still, now. She, like her husband, saw the urgency of God's justice and love in the face of the sin of racism and hate. She knew that God's call on her life was much greater than any suffering she might endure. And she endured much: terrorism and threats on her life and the lives of her family, and she endured the murder of her partner and best friend, Martin. Not that this HAD to be this way, but it was. And yet, she was compelled to go and abandon what appeared to be all regard for cultural norms.

And thank God she did.

If not for Coretta Scott King, we would not even have the day to celebrate her husband's life. If not for Coretta Scott King and people like her, we would not have examples of what it means to march and protest in the face of injustice for so many, not just for black Americans, but also for our LGBTQI communities, for South Africa during the apartheid, for unjust wars and women's rights. So many of the same issues we saw lifted up yesterday during the nationwide women's march she herself had once walked and sat in silence for.

She herself believed in a social justice gospel, a term some of us discussed on Wednesday during the Conversations on life and faith. An understanding of the gospel as one that speaks to peace, acceptance, and dignity for all human beings—and also, a belief and trust in Jesus' message of the good news of God. "That the time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near." That God's kingdom is not like that of the systems of oppression and division. Rather, God's kingdom points us to the cross, where the gospel of hope and promise lay at the feet of the one who calls us to come and follow him. Put down our nets. Leave what is familiar. Not easy by any means. But worth it just the same. Why? Because we trust in God's promise to not just us, but to the world. A promise we can experience and continue to experience in our lives with each new call to action, and each new revelation of what it means to be whole and beloved children of God.

And Jesus walks on the road. Calls out to the disciples, "Follow me! \_\_\_\_\_" And they went. Immediately. Without question.

And thank God they did.

Was it without fear? Probably not, but that is uncertain. Was it without boundaries? Absolutely. His call to them is not unlike his call to us. It is a disruptive, resistance that urges us to proclaim the transformative nature of God's kingdom which has, is, and is to come. It is a call given to each of us by name, but not with expectations that we do it alone, rather a call to be in community with the reality that what we think we know doesn't even come close sometimes. It surprises us. It oftentimes causes fear, but it comes with a beautiful promise that there is transformation, reconciliation, restoration, and redemption in this blessed present kingdom that pushes us into actions we cannot always explain or even make sense of. But it still moves us, urges us into uncomfortable spaces, with the full comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus makes that move towards us. Calling us all. Reaching for us in such a life-changing way that it's almost hard to resist. Calling us, knowing we're not always going to get it right, but loving us to life just the same. Calling us to march. To serve. To share the peace. To walk with him. To walk with so many in need of love and hope. Ourselves even. To call out injustice. To feed the hungry. To care for the poor. To seek what is right. To love. But not alone. Never alone. You see Jesus is there too. Jesus does that first. We're following him. And he brings a new reality, where we see the world a bit differently, just as Coretta Scott King did, and just as I imagine the disciples did when they decided to leave it all behind. This reality is present with and among us. And it is here and now, and still to come.

And thank God, God does.

Amen.