

**Put Your Whole Self In**

Mark 1: 14-20

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

**A fish story:** I remember going fishing as a youth, and enjoying it. Unlike some, I did not grow up in a family who went fishing, but learned a few things along the way from my friends who were experienced. The story is told about Mark Twain who loved to go fishing, but he hated to catch fish. He went fishing to relax. He did this because when he did, no one would say he was lazy. If they would find him fishing, they would not question him. For Mark, fishing involved some labour – one needed to bait the hook, reel fish in, take off fish, bait the hook, etc. So Mark put his line in the water without a hook, laid back and relaxed without being bothered by fish or people. Mark knew how to make it appear he was busy fishing.

We read another story about fishermen in today's gospel (Mark 1: 16). ***“As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.”***

**God calls ordinary people.** The fishermen Jesus called as disciples were simple and uneducated people. As compared to the well-educated disciples of your typical Rabbi, Jesus' disciples saw themselves as inferior and not good enough by a long shot for the job. In spite of that, God chose such as these to do great work. Noah, for example had no experience in building an Ark; Moses was not a good speaker; David was a Shepherd – a profession taken by those who often could not get anything else. There are other examples in the scriptures of God using 'unqualified' people to do the work for His Kingdom. The point is that regardless of who we are or our background, God can and will use us if we are willing. We can feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of our circumstances, but God is much bigger than our circumstances and will use us in spite of that. I believe that God often calls us into areas we know little about, so we do not merely depend on our own abilities, but we put our trust in, and depend on God who works through us.

Why did Jesus include these simple fishermen? He included them because God's Kingdom is for everyone, not merely a select few. Jesus revealed this great truth to us through the words of scripture! Jesus' announcement is strong and decisive to all, ***“The time has come, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the Good News (Mark 1: 15).”***

**Not a question but a command:** When we read in Mark 1: 17 where Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people,” Jesus is not asking for volunteers, it is more of an inviting command - “Come, follow me!” The call from God is certainly a call to obedience where we are called to change a focus, a career, or a lifestyle. Has that been your prayer lately – for God to reveal his will for your life? When did you last follow what you believe to be God's desire and direction? In reflection, what have been the consequences of not following God's way? It is important to ask ourselves if we are like Mark Twain who has his pole in the water, without any hook on the end.

**Why does faith in Christ matter?** Faith matters first of all because it matters to Jesus. Faith in Christ is rooted in God's steadfast love and forgiveness for each one of us. This love and forgiveness then transfers to others and connects us all to be stronger as one body of Christ. The act of phoning, sending flowers, visiting, and praying for one another, for example, opens up the doors for the Kingdom of God to advance!

Faith matters because in God's love we are given hope for the future in spite of pain, suffering and life challenges before us. Faith matters because it casts out fear. We read in 1 John 4: 16b-21, ***“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in the world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached***

***perfection in love.***” Faith matters because it reduces fear and faith is a channel of God’s healing love to the body and the soul.

Consider this statement: We read in Mark 1: 18: *“And immediately, they left their nets and followed him”*. How could they just drop everything and go? One could argue that these fishermen had nothing of value to leave so it was easy for them. It is important, however, to remember in this context that since Jesus was a prominent Rabbi, he was a highly valued teacher who young students would want to follow. The calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John was considered a ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity – especially for these humble fishermen! A modern day comparison could be a wall-street broker saying to a boy selling hot dogs on the street, “Come, follow me, I will make you my apprentice!” Following Jesus is a life-time opportunity that we do not want to miss. Jesus speaks to us even today saying, “follow me.” It is important to ask ourselves this question: Are we willing to follow only when convenient or are we putting our whole selves into it?

**Put your whole self in.** Following Jesus may mean that we change our careers for that purpose. I believe, however, following Jesus first of all means to have our life’s focus on doing what he did in offering love and healing as a goal in everyday living. If we look closely at our vision statement for Oakridge Presbyterian Church, we are reminded of our focus of faith, *“A welcoming, growing, Christian community where faith comes alive.”* Faith comes alive when we love, we welcome, we greet, we call and we help. Each one of us is called to do this! Faith comes alive when we love as Christ loves us! Today at worship, find someone you do not know, or do not know that well and greet them, introduce yourself. Offer a word of encouragement! If each one of us engages at making Christ our focus, we and others will see faith that matters; faith that is alive and making a difference in daily life. Consider this story:

The husband of one of the faithful congregants of my Grandfather’s church was not a Christian man. In fact when the woman would prepare for worship and get their children ready for church, he would complain about church and how untrue it was, thus creating a negative atmosphere in the household every Sunday morning.

My grandfather knew the man and had become friends with him over the years. The man became sick with cancer and the diagnosis was terminal. My grandfather visited him and encouraged the man to put his trust in God and accept Jesus as his saviour. The man said that he knows Reimer (Grandfather’s name) means well, but he does not believe any of this fairy tale stuff. My grandfather continued to visit. The man appreciated the visits, but nothing changed in his faith as he was declining in his health.

One morning my grandfather was listening to his radio and heard a story about a bird that was flying over a large body of water and was getting very tired. The bird was not aware of how big the expanse was, and was beginning to understand that he did not have enough energy to turn back, nor enough energy to make it to the other side. He then saw a boat below and thought to himself that if he goes to the boat they will probably kill him for food. On the other hand, he thought that if he kept going this way he would surely die from exhaustion and fall into the sea. He decided to take his chances and land on the boat. As soon as he landed, the people on the boat saw that the bird was near death from exhaustion and they took him, fed him, and cared for him by keeping him warm and comfortable.

My grandfather said to the man, you are like that bird. Get on the boat and God will take care of you and give you new life. You have nothing to fear. The man responded and said, “Reimer, you are a good friend and I know you care for me, it is a nice story, but I do not share your faith.” My grandfather said goodbye and promised to see the man again soon. The next time my grandfather saw the man was a few days before the man died. Grandfather came into the house, spoke with his wife briefly and saw the man in the other room. He motioned for my grandfather to come close. The man then said, “Reimer, I am on the boat.”

Jesus is calling us to put our whole selves in for his Kingdom of love. Regardless of your feelings of inadequacy, Jesus wants to use you. Jesus is calling, answer his call! Amen.