

August 30, 2015 “The Way” Mark 1:14-20

All of the Gospels agree on this matter. It was early in Jesus public ministry that he called the disciples to follow Him. Here in Mark chapter 1 we are told it was after John the Baptist was put in prison. We are told that Jesus left the area where he was baptized and went into the Galilee region. That literally means the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee. It is in the northern part of Israel. The Sea of Galilee is shaped like a lemon, which means it is longer than it is wide. I believe I remember the numbers as 16 miles long and 3 miles across. The size of your average medium sized inland lake in our country. And by the way I learned none of these facts from commentaries or seminary. The trip to Israel at the end of January is where I suddenly had the light bulb go on and learned everything I know regarding the geography of that country.

That Jesus went to Galilee means several things. He recognized John the Baptist was treading on thin ice, stepping on the toes of the authorities, including Herod the tetrarch of Judea. Including the Temple priests who colluded with the Romans to continue to operate in their traditional fashion. John was not a priest. He was a lay preacher who probably trained at Qumran, the esoteric community who left us the treasury of the Dead Sea Scrolls. John the Baptist did not belong to the system. Jesus recognized that. Honored that. But Jesus also recognized there was danger in being an outsider. He put distance between Himself and Jerusalem.

With a few exceptions the fact is the majority of Jesus ministry was in these northern countryside communities. There were a lot of villages around the Sea of Galilee for obvious reasons. There was a ready to hand supply of fresh water. People could fish, so there was a ready supply of food. With fresh water even in Jesus

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time there was an opportunity to grow things....more food. Water plus the desert climate meant agriculture was sustainable. You could survive.

Jesus also knew HE needed time. It might be John the Baptist's time to die. He had prepared the way for Jesus rise to recognition. But it was not Jesus time to die. It was His time to minister, to preach and teach. To develop a following. To really develop some super star pupils,

disciples to carry on the work when Jesus time did come, as He knew it would. He went to Galilee because it was out of the way. Away from the big city. Away from the attention of the major authorities. Galilee gave Jesus time. HE wanted time.

So why is that background important? For one thing it explains in a little more detail why the early Christian movement, the followers of Jesus, were for the most part Galileans. They were not from one town or one village, they were from different villages and towns that surrounded the Sea of Galilee. But they had a common heritage. More of them were fishermen than anything else. They had things in common. And where they were significantly different, the bonding agent was simply and truly Jesus Himself. In Galilee, Jesus preached the good news of God.

And in Galilee Jesus called the first disciples. He saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, Sea of Galilee. Fishermen. Walking along the shore of Galilee, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John, the brother of James. They were getting their nets ready to go fishing. Washing them and mending them. And as we know that Mark was related to Peter, a teenager at the time, we can assume he was probably learning the family

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business at the side of his uncle Simon Peter and that is why he tells this story with such confidence and passion. He was there. He saw it unfold with his own eyes. All the principle characters: Mark not only knew them and worked with them they were members of his extended family. He is telling us this is the way he came to be part of that band of people (up to 120 in number) how he came to be there, followed Jesus, learned from Jesus. This is the way it happened.

Here is the part we forget, and forget to talk about. It is still the way the Christian movement regardless of denomination grows and continues. Here are the principles. Jesus was crucified roughly three years later. He rose from the dead on the Sunday following that now famous Friday. Jesus is alive. Jesus is alive and well and living in Stirling. Living in Belleville. Living in Toronto and Thunder Bay and Winnipeg and Calgary and Vancouver, Halifax and Goose Bay. Jesus is alive and among us. And He still reaches out, touches lives, and says to those individuals, "Come. Follow me." And some of us really do get to be the witnesses as

that process unfolds. It is the way faith happens. It is the way the church continues generation to generation.

From time to time I used to hear people say to me or I would overhear people say, “You know the Presbyterian Church, or the United Church or the Anglican Church, (put in any denominational tag you care too...they ought to have a national strategy to get more members. Never going to happen! And if you want to know why, here is the reason. Organizations do not cause the growth or the spread of the good news of God. That happens in communities, towns and villages and neighbourhoods in cities. And it happens in the same way that Mark describes here. Jesus touches

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lives. Jesus issues the invitation to come and follow him. And some people respond.

I will say it another way. It was the first principle of everything I learned when I studied for my doctorate at Fuller in California. It is God who grows His church. It is Jesus whom we worship and follow who grows the church. It is the Spirit of God poured out by the Father and the Son, who touches lives, warms hearts, moves souls, opens minds to the reality of the Kingdom of God and the fact that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Attainable. Reachable. As real as the earth beneath our feet, or the air we breathe, or the water we drink.

Because this is true, that the church belongs to God and not to us, and certainly not to me, we can never apply successfully to it the laws of doing business. Profit and loss. Membership drives as though we were in control. Because the reality is we are not. Here is the way it works: Jesus comes among us. To some he says, “Come and follow me.” And because it is Jesus they (we) wind up doing so. And the church continues. That's the first half of the way it happens. And it is the hardest part of the way it happens for us to recognize and take really, really seriously. First of all Jesus calls people to Himself. First of all.

In 1st Kings 8:39 we find these words: “Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men).” That is a statement about the very

nature of God. And we find these words in verses 59 and 60 of 1st Kings chapter 8: I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord day and night....so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and there is no other. It is God's power

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and love and His holy presence that touches us such that faith buds and flowers and blooms and bears fruit. Old Testament, New Testament, that is the way it happens.

Back to Mark chapter 1:14-20. It is a fair question to ask, have we no part to play in this? We do indeed. But before I go there I want to say again, it will be a fruitless endeavour, to share the faith, or to try to grow the church, to spread the good news of God, if we forget that we have no power to make this happen. The power is God's power and only He unleashes it in such a fashion that it bears fruit.

Remembering that 1st principle, we need to remember the 2nd. This is what Jesus said to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and they left their nets and fishing for fish and followed Him. This is what Jesus said to James and John the sons of Zebedee and Mark witnessed the entire thing and it affected him, so that he left what he was doing at the time and followed our Saviour Christ. "Come. Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And they left their nets and they followed Him. We are in training as we worship and praise God, and pray and read the Bible and listen to old men like me.

And what we are in training for is the human part of the God's plan. "Fishing for men." Fishing for people.

We are in training to care about people to a degree and in a way that the vast majority of people will never really understand, but which some will accept. For every person who unites with the Christian cause, who becomes a believer, who worships and prays and serves in the visible church, there is a person who issued an invitation very much like the invitation of Jesus.

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Someone who talks to someone else about how much their faith means to them. How much they have found the fellowship of the church, their local church means to them. How overcoming the hardest things in life has been

being a part of a caring circle that follows Jesus, the living Redeemer.

Someone, a parent, a friend, a preacher who was also a friend, made it meaningful for you. Meaningful enough that you wanted what that witness had. The hope. The joy. The comfort. The life and life everlasting. The church thrives, when people give away to others what matters to them most, namely their walking with God, their being in Christ. This is the way it happens. It was the way it happened in Galilee. It is the way it always happened.

Let us pray....

Lord thank you that the fate of the Church, this church, this fellowship is not in our hands but in yours. We also thank you Lord that we have a part of play, sharing, being willing to say out loud that we find this fellowship meaningful, because we find you are really with us. Bless us we pray. Lead us and guide us, and give us the courage, the faith, and the desire, to fish for lives. In Jesus name. Amen