

February 28, 2021 "The Way" Pt. 1 Mark 1:14-20

Dearly Beloved;

A few announcements to begin with: Annual Reports and Budget 2021 documents have been mailed. When you receive them, review them, please and send in your responses as requested. Glenn, Heather, the Session, the Board and I really want to hear from you, in terms of affirming our way forward in these extraordinary times. Follow the instructions accompanying the documents.

Secondly, in person worship will begin happening next Sunday as we return to the sanctuary. I will be checking this week, and if the communion pods are in the fridge, I am making an executive decision to include communion as part of the return to the sanctuary. I would remind us all, we need to sit 6 feet apart, remain masked for the balance of the service, use hand sanitizer, and be signed in as part of our keeping accurate records of who is present, in keeping with the Public Health rules. I will be labouring to keep this first service back within the time limit of 40 minutes.

I am also requesting that for the first month, we seek to avoid unnecessary meetings, such as Board and Session, just to operate as safely as possible. I will be consulting with Glenn and Trish, to figure out a safe timetable for meetings, but my first priority is to safely guide us through Lent and Easter, figuring out what else we may do safely, as we go. I suspect we are all aware that vaccinations are ramping up in our province and will likely make some semblance of normalcy possible. But

until that time the Public Health Guidelines offer the greatest margin of safety.

Finally, a reminder, that no one will be thinking ill of you if you are uncomfortable about attending services at this time. The online sermon will be available through the web site, along with the access to “The Sermon From the Dining Room Table.” With that, I have broken enough rules, to want to turn to the safety of the message.

Like my daughter, Rev. Rebekah, I have a fondness for the Lenten season of the church year. It is a time not only of personal reflection, but a time when we focus on the basic things that are part of the life of following Jesus, reminding ourselves that in 2021, we are all of us best described by the word disciples. You have often heard me mention that the word Christian appears 3 times in the New Testament, and always as a term of accusation, or disparagement. Being “Christian” in the New Testament era, was to have broken the law, and it was punishable by death. It was a term used by those who were accusing people like Stephen of doing something worthy of capital punishment. The execution of Stephen, witnessed by Saul of Tarsus, who would become Paul, the most eloquent teacher among the disciples and apostles, is described in Acts 7 beginning at verse 54.

As I have said, the word that best describes people like us is the word disciple. We are characterized by the fact we have a measure of faith. As a result of that faith, we gather together on the weekly anniversary of Jesus resurrection

to worship. And how we have missed that other descriptive New Testament activity of “breaking bread together.” Some assume that is a reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. And it can be used in that fashion. Most often it is a reference to another favourite activity at St. Andrew’s Stirling: gathering together following worship to enjoy fellowship that is spiced by food. No one has kept track of the amounts of cake and cookies and pies that have been consumed in the church hall following worship services. But that time of breaking bread together best reminds me of the “Soup Sundays” we used to enjoy, with 3 to 5 choices of different kinds of soup and platters of bread and rolls, and often sandwiches. Most of us did not go home for lunch, we enjoyed it at the Church. And we enjoyed it together following the singing of God’s praise, the praying of our prayers and a time in the Word. It is your, and my, involvement in all of those activities, that qualifies us to call ourselves disciples of Jesus.

In Mark chapter 1:14-20 we have the story of how Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John became disciples. Frankly, they were going about life, doing their daily work (I’m tempted to say minding their own business, which was fishing) when Jesus walked into their lives on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They were casting a net into the water. It is possible they were fishing, but it is also possible they were repairing it and cleaning it for use the next time they went out in their boat. Jesus engaged them in conversation. They probably thought they knew more about HIM, than HE did about them.

These are the facts. Mark was a teenager, and a relative of Peter. Simon Peter, is one of the prime sources of the teaching we find in this account written by Mark. According to Peter's testimony, Jesus had been teaching, preaching about the coming of the Kingdom. It was probably the background noise to the work the fishermen were doing. We tend to have the radio on, or the television. It's not that we are listening to every word so much as we are trying to entertain ourselves out of the boredom, or the routine of what we are actually doing.

So Jesus is teaching that the Kingdom of God is not somewhere out there in an undisclosed future, but that it is right in front of us, as close as the hands we are using to do the work we are engaged in. In Peter's case, cleaning and mending nets, with the help of Andrew his brother, casting a net into the water to wash it. Suddenly, Jesus is walking by them. HE stops. HE recognizes what they are doing, and HE issues an invitation. "Come follow me, and I will teach you how to fish for men." It's an interesting proposition. Just a little scary too. But the fact is, they left the net where it lay, their boat and the rest of their gear, and they followed HIM.(Mark 1:18) Remarkable.

And if that is not remarkable enough, a ways down the beach James and John are also sitting in their boat getting their nets ready for the next time they are out on the water. And with Peter and Andrew standing there right behind HIM, Jesus says, the same thing to them, "Follow me." James and John leave their father Zebedee, sitting in the boat with the hired men, who are part of the crew, and they "followed

HIM.”(Mark 1:20) Now, if your are like me you tend to be surprised they could do that. The fact is you have done something very similar.

I don't know how most of you came into the church, what I do know is that you came. And because I know what some of you have done, serving on Boards and Committees, in choirs, and groups that gather to accomplish specific work that benefits others, knitting, organizing events, making slow cookers full of soup, a loaf of sandwiches, baking a pie. I know the list is a long one and I've just scratched the surface... By means of circumstances unique to your own situation, you were tapped on the shoulder by Jesus. I didn't believe in God at all when I got tapped. By the way the late Rev. Peter Marshall used that phrase “tapped on the shoulder by the Spirit of God.” And you have been following HIM as a result. Listening to the preacher, participating in worship, paying attention to the Gospel by every means at your disposal during the Pandemic of 2020-2021. Breaking bread together with others who believe, even if they need help or you need help with unbelief. (Mark 9:24)

You see, if you read things like this message, or watch me reading this message at the dining room table, or gather in the sanctuary of a church, you are doing what Pete and Andy, Jim and John did. In the time of Stephen there would have been enough evidence to convict you of a crime that could have cost you your life. You are following Jesus, when he tapped you on the shoulder and said, Come, I'll show you how

to fish for people...how lives are changed, including your own. You are a disciple, one who studies under and follows, Jesus. And take it from me, the Kingdom of God is as close to you as the hand you used to access this message. Actually don't believe me...believe Jesus. And once again, in the season of Lent 2021...Let's follow HIM. It's a marvelous ride. He is The Way.

Let us pray;

Lord we are tempted to think that your disciples, are people who are more committed than we are. And perhaps even stronger or better than we are. Your word reveals that you loved common fishermen, tax collectors, zealots who had blood on their hands, and outcastes of all kinds. Remind us that there is room for us in your band of disciples, with our doubts, with our questions, with our shortcomings, self-perceived or otherwise. Help us in this precious season to walk with you, follow you, and hear your beckoning voice. Lead us we pray. Amen