

Our text for today reminds me of a lot of those “wait, what?!” moments we have in life, you know, those times when you just have to react to a request with, “You have GOT to be kidding me...!”

You’ve probably had a few...and if you’ve been reading your Bible, you know there are many of these in there. One of my favorite “wait, what” stories should actually be my husband’s to tell, but he’s not the preacher of the day! You can get his auto-corrected version another time...!

So when we had been dating for a while, we had lunch together one day and I began describing for him the future I envisioned for us, together. He was still adjusting to the fact of our friendship, but he was being very slow and dense about our future compatibility, so I shared with him my vision, and he had this “wait, what?!” reaction...go figure! He was going to take way too long to get to the point of asking about our future together, so being my usual patient, but preacher self, I helped him along by sharing the Good News I saw in our future together... I’m guessing that you may have some juicy “wait, what” stories to share how God has put you in the path of just the right person or persons, to bless yours and their future, be it a marriage or other adventure...!

Well, our story today is a Biblical story, not of marriage, but of a partnership in ministry. Rodney and I were blessed to find both marriage and ministry together, not exactly as I had preached to him so long ago, but in most ways so much better! Jesus finds 4 of his 12 inner circle disciples in our story today, and they answer his call to partnership in ministry together, immediately!

The story is quite boldly told, is it not? Immediately is one of Gospel writer Mark’s favorite words, just judging by how many times and where he uses it to emphasize the emergent nature of Jesus’ message and mission. So John the Baptist, who has been calling people to return to faith and life with God and baptizing them in that new faithful life, has been imprisoned. Jesus takes up the baton now, still reminding people to return to God, but now adding a few key tweaks to the message, to update it to his new leadership. As the Message translation quotes Jesus: “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the message!”

Thank God, God sent John first to catch people’s eyes and ears! Folks were already alerted to God’s imminent arrival...And this message of Jesus’ has been circulating around Galilee, so that the Hebrew people and a few others, oppressed and depressed by the Romans, were interested in Jesus’ message. I believe Simon and Andrew, James and John would have already heard of Jesus, and would have been talking with their extended families in

the fishing business about his message, and could he be “the one”. When Jesus calls to them to follow him, they drop their nets, leave the family and hired help behind, and follow immediately to hear what he has to say. It was not unusual for folks in those days to follow a public speaker – the Bible tells us of prophets and leaders who have followers; and in these days of Roman occupation and repression, people were looking for a hero, and in fact followed many different ones, political and religious.

First Simon and Andrew, then James and John, drop everything to follow Jesus. Simon and Andrew’s home becomes one of the bases for their Galilee ministry, with their family housing and feeding the disciples a few different times as recorded in the Gospels. Now, according to Mark, the disciples are very thick, and most of the time don’t get the life-changing implications of Jesus’ message... (which gives us hope for ourselves today, because we don’t always get that part either). But Jesus has the patience of an amazing mom or dad-- really the patience of God! --and forgives and teaches again, and gives them (and us) not just a second breakfast, but a second, third and fourth and 7 x 70th lesson on God’s love and forgiveness that never quit, inviting us to share in everlasting love and life both then and now, and forever.

This is the Good News of God, the Message, that Jesus launches after John is arrested. We do still need to repent, to turn around our lives and stop pursuing our selfish agendas, to pursue God’s generous agenda, but then we need to follow up with believing this Good News! Which is, that God is here in Jesus not to condemn the world, but rather that the world be saved through him (this is John 3:17, the essential “Part II the Sequel” to John 3:16; I encourage you to look up and memorize both verses together later!). This Good News, that God is here to heal and save us, and offer us an abundant, generous, everlasting life of sacrificial love that takes us higher and deeper than anything we could plan...well, to many of us, I think we think it is too good to be true, too overwhelming and scary, possibly too difficult for us to believe...Am I right? I think we all have those moments, after our “wait what” moments, when we think more deeply about the incredible offer we’ve received, where we evaluate and pause several times in fear, before we decide if we can go out on this limb and lift off to an amazingly difficult but overwhelmingly beautiful life we can lead with God and Christ, and the other partners in ministry who have answered “yes”, and invite us to go with them. We probably do not follow immediately, like these guys...!

But our questions today are asked of us, too, by Jesus and God, by our fellow disciples of today and from long ago (those disciples of the past on whose shoulders we stand), as well as by those disciples yet to come:

- 1) Will we repent, turn from our selfish ways AGAIN (yes, we take many opportunities to stray from the path and have to recommit –thank God for grace for our errant ways!) Will we repent and BELIEVE the Good News of God?

- 2) Will we follow Jesus, leaving behind our old business, and join him in this new business, of being an agent of grace, of love and mercy, of forgiveness and justice, of freedom and new life, especially for those who have been oppressed and left behind, as Jesus does in his ministry?
- 3) Will we fish for people with Jesus – seeking out folks who are lost, lonely, stuck in selfishness and greed, stuck in addictions, stuck in oppression, to offer them this Good News of Salvation and Healing in the forgiving and loving embrace of God and the community of disciples and communion of saints both now and forever?

What do you think? How will you answer? These questions are in our text for today. I invite you to re-read and think and pray about these for the rest of Epiphany—that's at least the next few weeks. They are not that unlike the questions we answer for our baptism, confirmation, and church membership. Will we reject evil, repent of our sin, resist injustice and oppression, and will we accept Jesus as our Savior and serve him as our Lord with the church of ALL people?

We constantly forget our vows, overlook God and Christ's presence in our daily lives, and stray from their directions. That is our human condition, and God knows that. So God and Jesus ask, again and again, forgive us again and again, and wait for our answer, to guide and bless us in the path of righteousness again, for the Lord's sake, and the sake of God's kingdom of Good News and grace.

What will be your answer? Can you turn from investing the almighty dollar in stocks, to investing the almighty dollar in people and a planet in need? Many of us have been doing that during this Pandemic, and I'm happy to say the church just shared your offering dollars given to the church this last year, with over a dozen mission partners of ours, both global and local, to help bring Good News and good lives to people in need. From Grace Children's Hospital to our own Meals on Wheels housed in our church, we have chosen to follow Jesus and share God's Good News!

Are you willing to fish for people? Are you willing to go with Jesus to invite family, neighbors, colleagues, and especially the poor and marginalized, to hear this Good News, and offer them the love of God and Christ in tangible ways? With teaching and healing, with counseling and housing, with clothing and a cup of cold water? Will we care for the least and lost, and meet Jesus there as we serve, as he tells us in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25? Some of us have done that at Hesed House, in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, even at our Illinois Youth Correction Center here in St. Charles.

John the Baptist warned people of God's judgment, if they didn't repent. Jesus as he started his ministry, changed the narrative quite a bit. He said God is here now! God's time is come, and you need to turn around and believe it! In the Old Testament, stories about

God's fishing were often told as stories of God's judgment, of God sorting out the bad fish and saving the good ones. Jesus' fishing for people is different: He is here on God's behalf to find and heal and save ALL of the fish, with God's Good News – not judgment, but rather forgiveness, grace, light and love. He tells us in John 14 that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life Everlasting. There is no way to God's love, except through Truth, Mercy, Justice, forgiveness and grace. Thank God, God's love is bigger than all fear, hate and death. As Dr. King reminded us, Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only Love can do that. Jesus is and shows us, the Light of the World in God's good news.

Our book studies right now, in our different groups, remind us of this Good News: God's love casts out our fear; LOVE that is Liberating, focused on Others, Vulnerable and Engaged can save our world; and God calls and can use, ALL of us, with ALL our gifts and failures, weaknesses and successes: we are all God's saints whom God invites to be loved, healed and saved and who are then sent to save others. Join our book groups, and learn and share this Good News with us!

Our Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, reminded us of these truths in her poem on Inauguration Day. (You can find her poem online, as a video of her telling it, and the text.)

She spoke of our straying, and getting caught in the pain of racism and pandemic, noting that “even as we grieved, we grew, even as we hurt, we hoped, even as we tired, we tried.” She said that “we'll be forever tied together victorious, not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.” She asks “where can we find light in this never-ending shade?” And she ends with: “There is always light if we are brave enough to see it; if only we are brave enough to be it.”

Jesus invites us today, to come to his light: to repent of our time serving ourselves in the darkness of selfish pursuits, and to rise to his call to follow and fish for people who are dying today in the darkness: to serve and assist those dying of covid and those in healthcare serving them; to serve and assist those languishing in homelessness, in poverty, in food deserts, in detention centers, in places recovering from disasters of fire, flood, war and genocide. The Good News is, that as United Methodists, we already have outposts of service and Good News in all these places. We can add our voices, our offerings, our hands and feet even, to connect with these people serving Christ as they serve our brothers and sisters in their time and place of need.

Let us, too then, repent, believe, and follow and fish, with Jesus, and our brothers and sisters here and around the world. Let us tell Jesus, who stands on the lakeshore of our lives: “Lord, with your eyes you have searched and known us, and while smiling have spoken

our name. Now our boats are left on the shoreline behind us. By your side, we will seek other seas.”

In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Rev. Lisa Telomen, United Methodist Church of Geneva

Benediction:

We leave our time of worship now, O God, to follow you and your son Jesus Christ into our world. Fill us and bless us with your Spirit o God, that we may have the insight and courage and strength to do your will, and to BE your light and love in our families, schools, work and communities. May we fish for your people faithfully, seeking to bring the blessings of your love and justice, forgiveness and healing to all in need, wherever we go and wherever we are, in your son’s name we pray, Amen.

Children’s Sermon 1 24 21

Hi young people, and young at heart! It’s good to talk with you today!

I am wondering if you can remember times when you were excited to be chosen for some new task? Perhaps it was when you were chosen to light candles for the family dinner; or maybe you were chosen to hold the dog’s leash for the first time; perhaps you can remember when you were chosen to push your grandparent’s wheelchair, or your brother or sister’s stroller? Do you remember when you were picked by your teacher to be a line leader for the classroom? Or to give the answer to a question for the class? It’s a big deal, isn’t it?! It shows a level of trust in your abilities, and respect for your leadership, as well as a LOVE for you as you learn and grow!

In our story from the Gospel of Mark in our Bible, we hear how Jesus chose his first four disciples. He calls to them to come, follow him and share his work, and they do!

God and Jesus know us well. They know what we CAN do, and they offer to help us do things, and they do things with us that are difficult. In fact, they are always with us and always love us, and they invite each and every one of us to follow them, so they can show us their love every day. We see God’s love in the beauty of nature, in the love of our families and pets, and in the kindness of neighbors. There are lots of ways we can follow Jesus and invite others to follow him, like these first disciples. Jesus tells us that when we are kind to each other, and help our neighbors with our words and our deeds, we are

following him, because that's what Jesus does! Jesus tells us that when we are kind and helpful, we are also helping him to love others. Sometimes when our lives are hard, we might have trouble recognizing Jesus' love in our lives. But others who are kind and helpful with us, help us to recognize God's love in our lives. That's why Jesus chooses us and calls us to follow him – and we can do that when we are young as well as old, so let's say yes and follow Jesus today, being kind and loving with our heart and hands and voices!

Let's pray: Thank you Jesus, for the joy of being chosen by you – for each and every one of us to be chosen by you as God's beloved children. Help us to show your love and our love for God and others, every day, in our words and our deeds. We want to help others to know you, and to know your love for them as well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rev Lisa Telomen 1/24/21 UMC of Geneva