

“Call as Interruption”
January 24, 2021

Mark 1:14-20

There is a new feeling for many in our nation: relief.

Perhaps Anthony Fauci expressed it best when he said last week that working under the new president gave him “somewhat of a liberating feeling.” And if you saw pictures of the good doctor, you’d think he’d had a facelift. He looked relaxed, at ease—liberated!

People talk about being able to breathe again.

They express relief that those in charge of addressing the pandemic in our nation are finally taking it seriously, that the economic upheaval of the pandemic might finally be addressed effectively, that our nation might actually respond to the cries for racial justice that have been raised in the past year.

No one thinks that life will be perfect or that our leaders will be flawless or that all our problems will be resolved. There is the sense, however, that we just might get through this after all—that our separation and our caution and our masks and our hand washing and everything else we have done and have left undone will, in time, lead us to what we can once again call “normal, everyday life.”

We might get through this.

We have learned in our time what it means to have life interrupted. In the past year our plans have been cancelled, our projects have been put on hold, and we have had to find new ways of doing even the simplest, most familiar tasks. Rather than leaving nets behind in the boats, business owners have been working furiously to find ways to keep their enterprises going. Rather than readily walking away, employees have been working harder, working differently with the hope that by the end of the week they would still have a job to come back to on Monday.

School is—well, whatever your grade level, school is *different*. Online or in person, kindergarten or graduate school, the usual ways of teaching and learning have been interrupted.

Weddings have been postponed. Funerals have been delayed.

The interruptions and the new ways of living required of us have not been easy. In facing the challenges of this past year we have called upon some of the best in ourselves: patience and perseverance, imagination and creativity, generosity and gratitude, good will and a good sense of humor.

There have been times, no doubt, when you have felt something like: “Well, I could have done that differently.” Or “Maybe I shouldn’t have done that.”

But we’ve been creating this path only by walking it. We’ve been figuring it all out as we’ve gone along. We make mistakes. We take wrong turns.

And we keep going.

Life interrupted becomes life as it is. And when this time of interruption comes to an end, we will find that we have come to a new place, that we are new people.

With all of this in mind, I read Mark's account of Jesus calling his first disciples.

We heard this morning of Jesus suddenly appearing in the remote area of Galilee, calling people to turn their lives in a new direction and offering them good news.

That sounds simple enough, but we quickly see that when Jesus calls people, all of life is interrupted.

Simon and Andrew, two brothers who seem to have a going fishing business, are at work. Simon, we are told a little later, is married and has a house. One day while at work, these brothers find themselves leaving their nets and heading off with Jesus.

James and John, two other brothers who are in the same fishing business with their father, encounter this same Jesus and have the same response as Simon and Andrew. Suddenly, mending nets no longer seems to matter. They leave their father behind with employees and walk away with Jesus.

Their lives are going along quite well, it seems, and then they are interrupted by the call of Jesus.

What powerful vision does Jesus give them?

What irresistible words does he speak?

“Follow me.”

That's it.

Jesus doesn't say, “God loves you.”

Jesus doesn't say, “Learn to pray.”

Jesus doesn't say, “Feed the hungry.”

Jesus doesn't say, “You can do better.”

Maybe, in time, they will know and do such things.

The first word they hear, however, the first invitation they receive, is simply, “Follow. Walk along for a while. Watch what I do.”

By walking along, they will learn who Jesus is.

By walking along they will learn who they are.

By walking along they will come to a new place that they could not have imagined.

Follow me. This is the simple call of God in Christ. And with it, all of life is interrupted.

I guess that's a major reason why people decide to belong to congregations. We're willing to put up with all the quirks of everyone else—and everyone else is willing to put up with our own eccentricities—because we want to be with others who have heard a similar call, we want to be with others who are living the interrupted life.

We want to be with others who have known a similar reluctance, a similar questioning, a similar passion.

We want to be with others who are walking together in the ways of Jesus Christ, known and to be made known to us.

In this way, when hearing grows dim, when love is slight, when despair and disillusionment grow strong—and you know these things happen—we might find support from one another along the way. There is great comfort and great strength to be found in knowing that we are in this together.

We need one another. The call of Christ is something we hear and understand not only as individuals but also *together*.

To Simon and Andrew, to James and John, to you and me, Jesus has the first word: "Follow me," interrupting life and offering new life.

From fishing to following, these first disciples eventually come with many others to the cross and then to the empty tomb. We remember them as people who never seemed to catch onto why Jesus did what he did, who never really comprehended who he was.

The stories of the disciples after the resurrection tell of them simply returning to their old ways, to what they had known, to fishing.

And then, well, you know what happened next. The risen Christ comes to them once again, calling them once again, interrupting their lives once again—for his work is not done. And it is not yet done even now.

So our lives, too, continue to be interrupted by the call of Christ.

So let me ask this morning, as our nation changes again, as we look ahead in expectation and relief:

What have you learned as your life has been interrupted?

What is the good that you have discovered in yourself and in those closest to you?

What calling do you hear in these days?

What new work are you discovering—or what old work do you need to return to in a new way?

Many people know of Albert Schweitzer as the Nobel Peace Prize winner and physician in Africa. Schweitzer was also a renowned organist and a respected theologian. He concluded his book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* with the words that are printed in the bulletin this morning, words that speak of the way in which Christ still comes to us and still calls us to follow.

Let us read them together:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name,
as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not.

He speaks to us the same words: "Follow me!"

and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time.

He commands.

And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple,

He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship,

and, as an ineffable mystery,

they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."