**Mark 1:14-20 January 24, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark the 1st chapter here re-reading these words. “And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I was younger I had the opportunity to take part in a community production of Charles Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol*. But I wasn’t the only one in the play, the entire Sherry family had parts. I’m still amazed at this looking back on it, but even though he had 3 kids and was serving a dual parish at the time, my father had the lead part of Ebenezer Scrooge, my mom was the accompanist on piano, and my brothers and I were put into a group that I can only describe as the “extras” of the play. We had roles like “boy carrying turkey” or “child number 3”. I remember distinctly the director getting all of the members of this special group in the play together, and telling us something that I’m sure many other actors have heard in their lives. We got what I can only describe as the “there are no small parts, only small actors” speech. We were told that while some of us didn’t say any lines, or sing any songs, we were still an important part of this production, as much as the stars of the show. The truth was, we were supporting characters at best, after all no one comes to a Christmas Carol to see “boy carrying turkey” or “child number 3”. But we were important to the overall play even though we were in supporting roles.

The truth is, supporting roles are important, yet often overlooked. This is true in life as well as in the study of the Word of God. It’s why I enjoy the particular Bible Study Series we are going through on Tuesdays looking at the Great Women of the Bible, because usually the women were in supporting roles, but it goes even deeper than that to look at other women of that period who would be like the supporters of the supporters! Sure you may have heard of Eve, or Sarah, Esther, or Ruth, but what about Rahab? Or coming up on Tuesday, what about Delilah? We overlook these supporting roles, they aren’t as memorable. Take for example our Gospel lesson this morning. Mark is the most straightforward of the Gospel writers and doesn’t spend a lot of time in describing the events of Jesus’ ministry. This means that Mark’s Gospel moves quickly, it is the shortest of the Gospels and gets right to the point. Mark doesn’t give us a lot of words to describe His calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John, but we know from the rest of Scripture that these four men were pillars of not just the support and care of Jesus in His ministry, but also the establishment of the early Christian Church. They are spoken of often in scenes like Peter’s solid declaration that Jesus is the Christ, they were present in the upper room for the institution of the Lord’s Supper, they were in Gethsemane with Jesus while he was praying and they were present at Jesus’ Ascension and at the miraculous birth of the Church as we know called Pentecost.

But what do we really know about these men? We know that they had an important part to play in Jesus’ ministry. We know that they helped support the physical needs of Jesus Christ by supplying food as we see when the disciples leave to buy food when Jesus meets with the Samaritan woman, and also when they stay at Peter’s mother-in-law’s house. They were supporters of Christ and His ministry, they did not speak on their own, and they did not input their own opinions or ideas into the truth of the Gospel. They did not receive the celebrity, and the fame that Jesus had. After all no one came out to the wilderness to see Peter, or Andrew his brother, or James, or John. They came to see Christ. They came to hear His teaching, and later on in their lives they take Jesus’ message to the world, the same message of repentance and believing in the gospel. These men took on humble roles as Jesus’ servants and whether we realize it or not they left **behind** a life that would have been filled with comfort and stability.

These common men were used for miraculous things. And this is true in the fact that Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John weren’t scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Roman officials, prophets or priests on their own. They were ordinary men, serving in vocations and occupations that aren’t so different from us in our own lives. We know that Peter was married. We know that James and John were working with their father in the family business. We also know that they didn’t simply leave behind a few nets when they followed Jesus. They left behind a business. Peter and Andrew were in the same area as James and John when Jesus calls them, and we know that if Peter’s mother-in-law had a house, than Peter did as well. James and John are in a boat when Jesus calls them, and they had hired hands. This wasn’t a small operation. And we shouldn’t misunderstand that they were a few poor men throwing some crudely put together nets into the water. They were financially stable. They had men who worked under them, and a father who had established a business. They left their places of prominence to be supporters of Christ and His ministry. They left behind earthly power, to be loyal and subservient to the Son of God.

It’s amazing to think of the sacrifices these men made, a sacrifice of comfort and peace in order to take on the amazing responsibility of being a disciple of Jesus Christ These men’s lives weren’t made any easier by following Jesus. As a matter of fact their lives in a lot of ways got worse. The pictures we see of their lives are filled with persecution, fleeing from certain death, hiding in upper rooms, being imprisoned and beaten, and inevitably they were killed for knowing and preaching the truth of the Gospel. Again, I remind you, as I did this past summer, look again at these symbols on the altar, you’ll find Peter, Andrew, James, and John’s at the end over there. There was no happily ever after, or a return to the joys and comfort of being fishermen.

Yet they were called, to be fishers not of bass and bluegill, but to be fishers of men, men who were in need of saving from the murky and disgusting waters of sin. Men who were floundering in their sadness and despair and were in need of the light and salvation that could only come from the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah. The waters were full at the time that Jesus came of sinners in need of saving. Of sinners content to live in their destruction and shame, thinking that they had no need for forgiveness, who needed to hear the call to repentance, and the reminder of the reality that they were in fact fallen and corrupt children of death if they remained in unrepentant sin. The waters were full of those who were drowning in their despair and grief, who thought that forgiveness wouldn’t even come their way, who needed to hear the soothing truth of the Gospel, that Jesus came to save them, and be with them, and forgive them, and give to them everlasting life.

Jesus called these men to serve him and be God’s instruments in His ministry to reach the lost, and help those who were drowning in despair and sin. And he does the same with us today. God calls us today, through His Word, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, working upon our hearts to reach out to those who are drowning in that same despair and darkness of sin, and show them the way to everlasting truth, and everlasting life. To give to them the truth that Jesus spoke of, and went out to preach from the beginning of his ministry. As Mark puts it in verse 14 and 15. Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” He calls us to bring to this world the same truth that the disciples brought; a message of repentance and a belief in the Gospel.

A message of repentance that we too need to hear for there are times that we find ourselves drowning in our own sense of self-worth and self-satisfaction. We too need to be brought to the mirror of God’s Law that convicts us of our sinfulness and shame. That shows us when we have disobeyed God’s Law and chosen our own comfort and happiness over the truth of His Word. He calls us to examine ourselves and see our own need to repent before we go out and call those around us to repentance. Which is why we all come together, and confess these words in the Divine Service here in God’s house “I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserved your temporal and eternal punishment.”

And with those words of repentance, and with the contrition that feels the weight of our sinfulness, God doesn’t call for us to leave anyone in despair and mourning, but He gives us the truth again, in the Gospel of God, which declares us righteous and forgiven by the work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel that says “Believe in Jesus Christ and You *will be saved.”* For salvation is found in the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God, God’s own Son Jesus Christ. And in his death the victory was won. The Gospel message that we all have the opportunity to take into this world is the simple truth, that God sent His Son into this world to save sinners from the despair of the waters of sin, and to bring them up out of the darkness into His marvelous light. And that message is what we, as God’s children, and as called followers of Jesus Christ, get to take into this world. We get to take to them the sure and concrete answers that say that salvation is found outside of our own efforts and our own understanding, and firmly rooted in the work of a man who came so long ago, and called fishermen and tax collectors, and ordinary men of all walks of life, to serve him and follow him as his disciples.

Today he calls us anew, to support Him and His Gospel and His Word, through everything we do in our lives. So even though it may be different, and hard, and not as face to face or interpersonal as it once was due to circumstances out of our control, still seek avenues and opportunities to go out into the mission field, go out into the waters of sin and destruction that surround us in this world, and bring the truth, and the life, and the way of Jesus Christ revealed in His Word and proclaimed in this place to all nations. For God has sanctified and blessed you. God has forgiven you, given you life, and brought you to this place to receive the gifts of salvation and life everlasting. And May God be with you this day and always, as we all support His work in our lives, and reveal to the world the work of God’s own Son, who saved us from sin and gave to us eternal life.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.