

Year B Epiphany 3 2018

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62:5-12

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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### **The Holy Gospel of Saint Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

<sup>16</sup> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

### **The Gospel of the Lord**

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Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

The hardest part of Sunday school for me was always the sitting part. I had always loved the singing part, and the snacking part, oh and who could forget about the playing with playdough part. But the sitting part, that I always found hard. For as long as I can remember my mind has always been running at a sprinter's pace, thinking of this and of that, making it hard to pay attention to the task at hand. Despite this fact, for some reason, during story time the flannel-graph made my little rushing mind come to a stop.

You know what I am talking about right? Flannel graph - that big board covered in felt, carrying on it an ark's worth of biblical forms, shapes, and creatures. Its appearance each Sunday brought a new host tiny friends who, with God in the flannel form of Jesus, were always at the center of the scene.

Jesus wearing a white robe with a blue sash, smiling at me through his wind-swept hair, greeted me each Sunday morning. While my vision of Jesus has changed over the years, my Savior, in his early flannel form, was just as marvelous and captivating as he is now. Multiplying fishes while curing every disease, and teaching people from every land about God's mercy, grace, and peace.

Upon reading the gospel lesson for today I couldn't help but remember back to my first encounter with this story upon that flannel board. Jesus calling the disciples sealed within their fabric form, following him in a mass blob, seemingly forgetting to drop the nets they jointly held, almost as if to carry them along just in case this whole following a rabbi

thing didn't work out as they had planned. But one thing had always troubled me about this gospel lesson. At that young age it was not the inaccuracy of the flannel story, or Jesus' Swedish looks, it was the ease with which the fishermen left their homes, and their families, to venture out into the world with this unknown Rabbi.

This was something I could never understand. I remember asking my mother how these men could leave their families to go with this stranger. Having heard time and time again the story of Jesus growing up, I knew the adventures that awaited the disciples as they went out into the world. But I had also been strongly educated by my parents in the ways of stranger danger and so I knew better than to follow a random person for any reason without the correct safe word. And maybe this is why I found this story so hard to understand as I just couldn't figure out why the disciples would have left their father's boat and gone out into the world.

However, a few years ago a preacher named Rob Bell helped me put this entire story into perspective.

Jesus and the disciples were living in a first century Jewish world, where the Torah's holy scripture and the people's faith in God influenced every moment of their life. Many of these fishermen would have been sent to their local synagogue from the age of six on, to learn and memorize the words of their faith and its influence on their world.

This class was called Bait Sa fair and by its end the children would have memorized the entire Torah by heart: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, all by the age of 10!

Now those children who were unable to complete this task would have been asked to return home to begin learning their family trades, but those who were able to accomplish this, who were the best at memorizing, were allowed to carry on to the next step of their education, Bait Talmud, where they would memorize the remainder of the Jewish scriptures - yes that's right - the rest of the scriptures, Joshua right through to Malachi. The entire Hebrew Bible, memorized by heart, by the age 15 (and you thought confirmation was bad!) As you can imagine this is not a feat all 15 year olds would accomplish and so if they failed in this attempt they would be sent home to return to learning their family trades after giving it their all.

But the best, of the best of the students who showed the most promise and the most poise, would be invited to carry on to the final stage of their education Bait Midrash.

At this time, they were allowed to apply to learn under a Rabbi as their disciple. Now this was not for the faint of heart. Upon finding a Rabbi that the student would want to model their very life and faith after, they would try out for a position as a disciple of that Rabbi.

Now the Rabbi would grill them, asking them all kinds of grueling questions about the Law and the Prophets, and if they managed to impress him with their memory, and they had proved that they were one of the best of the best, then the Rabbi would say “come and follow me” and at the age of 15 they would become one of his disciples, leaving their family, friends, and synagogue behind them to follow this Rabbi alone.

And as you might have guessed, if they failed in this task, if they weren't quite good enough, like the many others who had been cut before them, the Rabbi would send them back home.

So in today's Gospel when we first meet Simon and Andrew, James and John, We hear they are fishermen.

They are working in their family trade.  
Meaning that they are not the best of the best.  
They are the left behinds.  
The not good enoughs.  
The religious B team.

Somewhere along the way, no matter how hard they had tried, they were weeded out. The rejects of the rabbinical system that no teacher in their right mind would ever have thought to take on.

In fact, in Simon and Andrew's wildest dreams they likely never imagined they would see any life outside of their fathers' boats, never mind take on a coveted position with an up and coming Rabbi. Because by now, they were far away from that scholarly tradition. Their minds had been numbed by years upon the waters, their hands hardened and cracked from dredging the nets up from the sea. They weren't the young bright pupils Rabbis would have wanted, and they may have even wondered what they had to offer anyway. After all, they had been cast out and sent back to spend a life working with their hands and not with their minds.

So when Jesus passes by Peter and Andrew casting their nets out from their boat, calling to them as a Rabbi would, saying “come and follow me” with shock and awe they would have followed just as the Gospel has said, because what Jesus was truly saying to them in that moment was this:

“I believe in you.  
You can be like me.  
Yes, you there, in the boat.  
The not good enoughs, the second class, the left behind and forgotten,  
Yes, You.

You are the ones I want to walk with, as we share God's love and grace within the world."

In the calling of his disciples Jesus turns the tables of the religious world upside down. Proving that being a follower of Christ isn't just for the best of the best. It isn't just for those who are gifted in speech, academia, or memory, as important as those things at times can be. Christ calls us all, even those who have never set foot inside an educational building in their life. The young and the old who, those who struggle with not only biblical texts but also with their life of faith as they walk in this world.

And throughout out his ministry Jesus continued to prove these points time and time again, crossing borders and boundaries that had long been set up within that first century world to fence people out from those within. Ministering and healing those who were cast out, calling out to tax collectors and prostitutes, women and eunuchs, all the while naming and claiming them as cherished and loved creations of God. Jesus chooses to call Simon and Andrew, James and John, and each one of us here today, because he is building a world without walls and without barriers. A world turned on its head - where our heaviest burdens are made light. Where we can be safe from all forms of oppression that threaten to snuff out our God-given light.

And this isn't just important because it happened all those year ago – its important because it is happening here and now in this very room. As a congregation after listening to the call of the Spirit, you chose to openly welcome and recognize all children of God within this community of faith. In becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation you chose in your worship and mission to be a witness to God's restorative love, grace, and justice within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer communities here in Edmonton.

In doing so, you have acted to tear down the boundaries that many churches have built up, choosing to welcome and affirm in love all those LGBTQ+ children of God who have longed to find a church home. A home where they wouldn't have to hide their true selves to be welcomed into a community of faith.

Opening wide the church to become a more inclusive presence of God's life giving restoration within the world. A presence that states that all lives are welcomed, included, and celebrated within this community – when we ensure all can find sanctuary within these walls.

So this month as we celebrate our ministry of inclusion and welcome, we not only open wide the doors of this church to those within the LGBTQ+ community, but also for all those who have been othered by this world. Those who have been left behind, those who have carried the hurts and pains of this world for too long. Those who for whatever reason have had a hard time finding a place where they can belong.

And as we do so we also know that our work in this world as followers of Christ is far from done, because in God's ever expansive grace there is always room to welcome not only you and I, but those who may never have thought they could be found by God's love.

So we continue to listen for Christ's call to us today, knowing that this gospel lesson is not just something that happened long ago – but is alive and well within us and this community of faith. A message from Christ that continues to call to us and say:

“You, Yes, You,

The one who thinks you are too old or too young to make a difference in this world,

The one who feels burdened with sorrow or bound up in sickness,

The one who is searching for peace in the midst of injustice,

The one who feels small and left behind,

The one who feels they may have nothing left to give.

The one who wonders how you fit in the midst of our ever changing world.

You, Yes, You! You are the ones I have chosen. You are the ones I want to walk with as we minister to God's ever growing kingdom in this world. To spread light where there is darkness, Freedom where there was oppression. To be followers of Christ – bringers of God's love, grace, and peace within this world.

And so it is my prayer for us today that we, like the disciples, might consider dropping our nets to follow God in a new way. That we would be able to cast aside our worries and fears, stepping outside our comfort zone to welcome others as Christ has welcomed us here in this place. And that as we do we would continue to answer yes – as we are called to follow Christ.

And may this be so among us - Amen.