

“Rediscover Jesus: Someone Irresistible”

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August 15, 2021

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

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. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:14-20

Today we’re beginning a new series in the Gospel of Mark we’re calling “Rediscover Jesus.” In structure, it really won’t be all that earthshattering. In fact, what we’re doing is pretty simple—one of my favorite things to do when we do a sermon series really. We just start at Point A in Scripture and move forward until Point B, and whatever is in between is what we’re going to look at. And this particular series is going to go through most of the first two chapters of Mark’s Gospel, the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry in Galilee.

But there’s a bigger reason, I think, and we can’t completely take credit for it. We had mapped out these passages on the schedule almost fifteen months ago, but as we got closer we realized that in this time of year, and not just this time of year but in particular *this* year, there’s a lot of coming back to things. May not be completely normal yet, but there’s a lot of coming back. And as we come back to things, there’s a sense of discovery, of rediscovery, of what we may have missed for the past year and a half. Maybe that goes for faith too, for some of us.

Just immediately we may have put the wrong title on it, because even just saying “Rediscover Jesus” implies that we already have discovered him, and for some of us, there might be a lot that we don’t know about Jesus. I’d go so far as to say that there’s a lot that *all* of us don’t know about Jesus, because he is never finished showing us something new about who he is and what it means to follow him. So as we go into this series of discovery or rediscovery, I invite you to ask, who is Jesus showing himself to be? I think no matter what, you’ll be surprised by something, and for the better. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

[Read passage.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Will you pray with me? Holy God, for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

As far as recruiting or sales pitches go, this one’s pretty bad. You ever think about it that way? I mean Jesus’s pitch, if you can call it that, to these fishermen, it’s pretty bad, right? “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Imagine that some stranger came up to you at your job or at your school or in the middle of your daily labor and said, “Drop what you’re doing. Come with me. And then do what you were doing only different.”

No carrots, no incentive, nothing. Just drop what you're doing, and completely reorient your life around me. Not exactly Dale Carnegie, is it?

In fact, kind of the opposite, right? Flies in the face of most of what you think in terms of persuasion. Years ago, I worked for a little bit as a door-to-door salesman. I know, right? Not the most fun job in the world, but you learn a lot. I sold those security system plans that you put in your house with the keypad by the door and all that. And no doubt there are a bunch of us here who would be and are better sales people than I ever was, but one thing they teach you to do is not just to come out guns blazing into a sales pitch. You try to learn something about them. You try to build rapport. You try to sense what their concerns would be. How long have you lived in the area? Has there ever been a break in in the neighborhood? Do you feel safe in this community? Does your family feel safe if you're away? That sort of thing. You don't just launch into a product demo; and you definitely don't say something to start off like, "Drop what you're doing, come with me, and you can sell security systems too." Worst sales pitch ever.

So why on earth do these dimwits buy it?

You heard what happened. Jesus just passing along the Sea of Galilee, this inland lake, and comes to these two groups of fishermen, two brothers Simon and Andrew in one and two other brothers James and John in the other. Jesus comes up to the first group, to Simon and Andrew, and says "Follow me and I will make you fish for people," and they say, "Buzz off, weirdo, we're busy." No, that's not what they say. It says, "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him." Immediately.

Then Jesus goes up to the second group, to James and John. Jesus calls them—Mark doesn't tell us, but presumably using the same line, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people"—and they say, "Is the sun in your eyes or something? You can't see we're kind of a big part of this whole operation. Our dad's here, our employees are here." You see, when you hear fishermen in this case, don't think subsistence labor just scraping by, rather think small family business, probably in the family for decades, maybe even centuries, so they tell him to get lost. No, that's not what they say either. It says, "They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed Jesus."

In both cases, these pairs of brothers dropped everything to go with this man who had called them to follow him. Why? Mark doesn't really tell us, honestly. There's not a lot to go on. Something about him, though, made these men drop their nets.

Was Jesus just so compelling, in a kind of quiet, unassuming way that they just knew that this was the right thing to do? Maybe. Had they ever met him or heard him before in their lives? It's hard to say. The way Luke and John tell the story there may have been a couple of other encounters—or at least a few more chances for these fishermen to know more about what this Jesus was about—but that doesn't seem quite as important for Mark. Jesus begins his ministry, which Mark describes as proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, and subsequently calls his disciples. He proclaims the kingdom and then calls his disciples.

I don't think it's any mistake that one leads into the other. In fact, I wonder whether it was something about the kingdom he was proclaiming that made his call so irresistible. Jesus doesn't tell us all that much about it, about this kingdom, at least not yet. Later he would tell us that this kingdom is something that grows, something that runs counter to how the world operates, something that values and lifts up the lowly, but he doesn't say that yet. Only that this kingdom was at hand, that it was good news, and that one was to repent and believe it.

“Repent” is one of those words. Did any of us flinch when you heard it? If you had a bad experience with church, say when you were younger, like you were in an environment that brow beat you with “do this” or “don’t do that,” then “repent” might be kind of loaded for you. It might sound like, “You did bad things, and you should feel bad about them, and that’s it.” And if that’s what you hear when you hear a word like “repent,” then it makes Jesus sound like all those other voices you’ve heard guilting you about mistakes you’ve made. Not exactly good news, and definitely not worth dropping your nets over.

But what if it meant something different? Now don’t get me wrong. Sometimes we do bad things, and it’s not like we should feel great about it. But that’s not what this call to repentance and good news is all about. That’s not what Jesus is about either. “Repent”, as in the original word itself, means something like, “to change your mind” or “to change your view,” and it does involve recognizing that your life has been one way, but then changing your whole view, leaving that behind, and then following another way. So you can kind of see where there’s a bit of “Yeah, I didn’t do so well there.” But that’s not the core of what Jesus is saying here. He’s saying something more. He’s saying there’s a new reality at work and in effect, a kingdom emerging unlike any other, and in that kingdom the old ways will not serve us anymore. We have to look at things differently.

And that’s important for us to see in what Jesus is saying, because I know that for some of us here, the message you have heard or thought you heard when it comes to this Jesus that all these people seem to be talking about sounded like, “You filthy little sinner. You should feel bad about yourself.” We *are* sinners. And it’s not like we should feel great about it. But if the message you’ve heard about Jesus is one that only tells you how awful you are and leaves you there, then I invite you to hear, to discover, to rediscover, what he is actually saying: there’s a new kingdom at work, a way that can free us, a way that completely changes the way we see things, because the world looks different now.

On Friday at the start of our stay retreat, Buddy Sexton who was our speaker for the weekend shared a lot about our calling, and what it means to be called. Shared that it was a calling of the unqualified. And he also said, “Jesus calls us to take part in *his* calling.” He doesn’t just say, “Here’s the good news. Now y’all just kick your feet up and chill out while I go around telling everybody else.” There’s no, okay, you’re saved, but you need to study up before you’re of any use to me. Jesus calls immediately, calls us to take part in his calling of proclaiming the good news of this kingdom, and calls us long before we’d ever thought we were qualified to do so. It changes things.

Last week, a group of nine people got together. These nine people (Betsy Child, Johnson Brownlow, Stephanie Daniel, Julieanne Foy, Cammy Glover, Vance Link, Doug Peek, Todd Stamper, and myself) are charged with discerning just how we sense God calling us as a congregation, what specifically that looks like, in the next 5-10 years. This is that big strategic vision process that I shared with you a couple of months ago. These are just initial conversations, so each of us were sharing things like, what kind of church we are now, what kind of church do we feel led to be, how does that play out in real time. Big questions, important questions, ones that will involve a lot of feedback and buy in from the whole congregation.

And at one point, Doug Peek offered a simple answer to one of those “why” questions we were discussing. Why should we go about this process? Because saying, “Well we hope to keep the church going for another ten years just to keep it going,” is a stupid answer. His answer was, “Because the world needs it.” Not, “the world needs us,” as if we were so special and valuable. That’s not what he meant. But because he saw, as I do, and as you might see too, a world that was in need of a message of grace, of a new way, something that’s much bigger than me or you or this one congregation.

When you see things in that light, it's hard to see things the same way.

Doug later shared with me his own background of working as a lifeguard, and not just as a lifeguard but as a lifeguard that trains other lifeguards. The purpose of a lifeguard is of course to save lives in and around the water, and that's what Doug did when he was younger. But he went to school and entered a different career, and long story short, he hasn't worked as a lifeguard in over thirteen years.

Still, he shared, he can't go to a pool or a lake or a waterpark or a beach without doing a quick scan to see if anyone is in distress in the water or drowning. He can't help it. The way he sees a pool or a lake is different and always will be.

He said that's a lot of how he sees a life of faith in Christ too. It's not about just sitting back and reflecting on how nice it is to be saved. It changes how you see things, because everyone, he said, knows someone who is drowning. Someone for whom the message of a coming kingdom would be good news.

That someone could be you. That someone could be someone you know, someone you love. Whether it be by stress or ambition or addiction or depression or any of the long list of things that this world puts on your shoulder, you know someone who's drowning. And there's someone else who's calling you to fish for people, to draw them out of the water.

The way that looks could be different. The way Jesus calls us could be different. It's not a surprise that Jesus called these first disciples in the language of their own work. They were fishermen, and he called them to fish for people. But how might that call sound to you?

If you're in education, "You may teach the mind, but I'm calling you to teach the heart."

Or if you're in health care, "You may help heal the body, but I'm calling you to help heal the soul."

Or if you're nurturing a family, "You may be raising children, but I'm calling you to raise disciples."

Or if you're in business, "You may earn good profits, but I'm calling you to bring in truly eternal returns."

And why would we listen to such a calling? Because we need it. Because the world needs it. Because that someone who's drowning is in need of a message of grace that there's a different kind of kingdom and a different kind of king at work.

And that might be hard to pass up.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.