

**“Come Down to the Lakeshore”**

**Mark 1.14–20**

**The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong’l UCC, 22 January 2006**

You’ve likely heard this passage many times before... probably because it occurs in all four gospels in some form. We know that Mark’s gospel is the earliest in Bible, probably written around 70 A.D., about 37 years after Jesus’ death. If you think of the four gospels as an archaeological dig, in the first (most recent) layer you would encounter is John’s gospel. Further digging would yield the earlier gospels of Matthew and Luke, and at the deepest, earliest level (at least among the canonical gospels) you discover Mark’s gospel. I think of it as the no-nonsense gospel. The language is more blunt and unadorned, and it serves as a source document for the writers of Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels. In Luke’s account<sup>1</sup> you hear a classic story of God’s abundance when Jesus rows out with the fishermen, asks them to drop the net on the other side of the boat, and they pull up an impossibly huge catch. (I’ve tried, and this doesn’t work with fly-fishing.) But, old Mark makes it plain and simple: Jesus calls the disciples to follow, they leave their families, their nets (i.e., their occupation) and go forward in faith. (Faith is one of those loaded theological words, and in this instance it means *deep trust*, rather than believing the unbelievable.)



Many of us really like the second hymn we sung. It’s got a really lovely tune and the words are simple. But the characters and theme come from a very different social location than many of us live in. Those fishermen we hear about have “neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,” but rather “just fishnets and will for working.” These are not people living a middle-class American lifestyle. They’re closer to landless *campesinos* working in Central America, perhaps enduring military oppression. And still they leave behind what little they have to follow Jesus.

*So, when you come down to the lakeshore, what are you prepared to leave behind?*

The disciples left their families, which would be very unusual in first century Judea. It was their way of connection to society; individualism as we know it would be a totally alien concept for them. And Jesus is asking them to sever bonds and forsake the “family values” of their culture in order to follow a new way.

The disciples become “second-career ministers” (near and dear to my heart), abandoning their trade – their only way of making an income. They go way out on a limb. These are people who meant it when they prayed to God to “give us today our daily bread,” because they didn’t know where tomorrow’s food was coming from or how they would get it. They have no reserve of food or wealth.

***Discipleship is a risky business.***

Ordained Roman Catholic priests, nuns, and brothers take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which essentially mirrors what those first disciples did down by the lakeshore. They gave up family, financial security, and followed Jesus. Can you imagine doing that: renouncing your family and property to follow Jesus? (*I’ll bet a few of your family members would be really ticked off.*) At least since Luther introduced the concept of the priesthood of all believers, it has been impracticable that *all* of us ministers (me, Sharon, and every one of you!) should be celibate and without families.

The archetypal American utopian sect – the Shakers – tried that, and they have nearly died out. (Only a few Shakers remain at the community at Sabbathday Lake,

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<sup>1</sup> Lk 5.7

Maine.) Since they mirror the first disciples, leaving family behind and didn't have kids, their only way of maintaining their numbers was through conversion of non-Shakers.



Most of us at Plymouth are not going to divest ourselves of all our family members (*but I'm sure each of us could make a few nominations!*) or leave our current careers to follow Jesus. But, looking at this kind of renunciation in a somewhat broader sense, we are asked somehow to leave our nets behind. Perhaps they aren't family or career nets... maybe they are safety nets.

The insistence on our own sense of security runs rampant in North America. We live in gated communities, so that we're protected from those who would take our wealth. As a nation we have an ever-expanding sense of defending ourselves against the prospect of aggression, and in the process we become aggressive ourselves. You know as well as I do that this kind of security is false... it is a phantom. The only real security I know of is following a life of faith, which for Christians means following God through Jesus.

And when do you as a person of faith play it safe? On a deeply personal level, when does your own sense of security – *not taking risks as our faith in Christ calls us to* – begin to affect you? When is a lack of risk-taking deadening to a living faith life?

Sometimes I feel as if the safety nets around me begin to close in and become nets that bind and entrap me, whether those are nets of career or financial security.

Do *your* safety nets ever begin to close in and prevent you from following Jesus with all your ability? Which nets bind *you*? What is it that *you* need to release, let go of, and stop grasping for?

This kind of change or radical shift is called *metanoia* in Greek. It's the spirit of transformation that accompanies a faith journey. *Metanoia* is usually translated as "repentance," but it's much more than saying your sorry and trying to do better next time. It's at the core of our faith, which is about *transformation*.



As you and I walk together down to the lakeshore, my prayer for you is that you will be able to identify the nets that are a burden to you, and that as you follow Christ, you will be able to leave some of those nets behind. It won't happen all at once... it's a lifelong process. And I wish you grace and peace as we travel together.

Amen.