

**Mark 1:14-20** <sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" <sup>16</sup> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

### **“Leaving Everything”**

The inauguration of Barack H. Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States of America sounds to be a watershed event of hope globally. Listening to CBC interview people in Washington, D.C. and all over the world, it seems that there is a world-wide feeling that a new day has dawned, a new era in global relations. People are strongly hoping that this man, Barack Hussein Obama, is the harbinger of change that will not only get America out of war, not only turn the economy around, not only bring about environmental solutions, not only end the dominance of big money cronyism in Washington, and on and on, and in so doing redeem the name “American” throughout the world.

The expectations of this man are steep and we ask whether he can fill his own shoes. Yet, the more important question to be asked is whether the American public will follow suit and make the very personal and very costly changes needed for this new era to manifest. It's like saying, “Obama is going to save the world, but...oh yeah...somebody needs to leave some nets behind. Not me. I'll just hold off on buying the Lexus and take the bail out and the tax break and hope my investments hold and things will be like they used to be in no time.” This dawning new day is a decisive moment that requires a response, a change in the American people or all will be for naught.

Well, I've brought all this Obama stuff up because this new day dawning in a slight way gives us insight into what was going on in Jesus' day. I am in no way equating Barack Obama to Jesus the Christ. I'm just drawing a meager analogy to what people were expecting and were seeing in this Jesus of Nazareth when they saw him, heard him teach, and witnessed and experienced the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God – the healings, exorcisms, and feedings. They were probably very strongly sensing that in this Jesus a new day was dawning.

In fact, a new day really was dawning. That's what Jesus was announcing saying, “The time has come; the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe this royal proclamation of divinely powered good news.” The Greek word *kairos* which we translate as “time” means a decisive moment that demands a response. Jesus himself is that decisive moment. The demanded response is to repent and believe, to leave behind what you're doing and enlist your life in Jesus' work of bringing in the kingdom of God by falling in behind him and following.

## “Leaving Everything”

I'm not sure if I'm letting us off the hook in noting this, but according to the Gospels there were only twelve people whom Jesus asked to follow him and the result of that was leaving everything behind (thirteen if count the rich young man who went away sad). There were others who did this without being asked. I'm thinking of several women and some of them were the wealthy women who supported Jesus' ministry. At times there were crowds who left what they were doing for a time to follow him around to see what he would do. Nevertheless, following Jesus always results in leaving some things behind from the extreme of everything for always and to the lesser extent everything for awhile.

Of these twelve, the first four were fishermen. Why fishermen? The only thing that I could think of was that somehow fisherman would intrinsically understand something about the nature of the work involved in God's bringing in his kingdom through Jesus. It's a lot like fishing. To begin with and speaking allegorically, the net is the means by which people are brought in to the kingdom. Essentially, the net is the proclamation of the gospel by the church.

As a matter of review, in the Roman world a gospel was an imperial pronouncement from the emperor or concerning the emperor that was considered to be good news. And, since the emperor was considered to be closely connected to the gods or even a god, the gospel was somehow imbued with divine power. In the Christian faith the gospel is essentially that Jesus is Lord and has delivered his creation from the powers of sin, evil, and death and presently the evidence of his Lordship, the Kingdom of God, is breaking into the present through the working of the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns to resurrect everyone from the dead and create all things anew at which point all peoples will be evaluated with respect to how well they lived in the kingdom while it was coming in order to determine their place or status or ranking in the new world. That Gospel was and is empowered by the Holy Spirit and like scooping fish out of the water with a net, so it brings people into the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

So then, the work of the kingdom which these fishermen would intrinsically understand was casting and preparing the net. These first four fisherman fished by casting a net not by bait and lure. The kingdom spreads by the simple proclamation of the gospel in word and action not by gimmicky whatever's to try to attract people and work a decision out of them. I don't know what became of Andrew other than he's the one who found the little boy with the five loaves and two fish and according to John's Gospel he initially brought Peter to meet Jesus. Peter, on the other hand, became a great caster of the net in the early years of the church. He went up into Syria and southern Turkey and eventually to Rome.

James and John, on the other hand, were preparers of the net. Jesus found them in their boats preparing the nets. James became the head of the church in Jerusalem until he was martyred. John was the longest lived of the Twelve and became something similar to a bishop in Ephesus watching over the churches of western Turkey. If you're catching my analogy here, a great deal of work, often the most tedious work is preparing the net, or rather building up the church, the body of Christ, that it might make and live the gospel proclamation.

## “Leaving Everything”

Well, for all of us Jesus and his kingdom is the most decisive moment in our lives and as such a moment Jesus and his kingdom require from us the response of faith and repentance, of leaving behind what we're doing and enlisting our lives in Jesus and his work of bringing in the kingdom of God by falling in behind him and following. This in turns means that the primary responsibility in our lives is the work of either preparing or casting the net. The Holy Spirit has gifted us each with abilities for ministry that by working together we may prepare and cast the gospel net. The question that then follows is what are your gifts and where do they fit into the life of Christ's body.

Some of you may be thinking that this stuff about the Holy Spirit empowering you with gifts for ministry is a bit weird. After all, our tradition tends to stress faithful following of Jesus that demonstrates itself through being morally upright and ethically compassionate. We don't know what to do with those charismatic gifts that Paul lists in First Corinthians 12 that includes things like speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues, prophecy, words of wisdom and knowledge, performing miracles, and healing. We tend to relegate those to the Pentecostals and call them weird. Paul later gets a little tamer in Ephesians 4 where the gifts become offices of ministry such as apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist. In Romans he gets even more practical talking about the gifts of hospitality, compassion, administration and so on.

Yet, this talk of gifts for ministry doesn't have to sound so foreign. All we need do is remind ourselves that like Peter, Andrew, James, and John everything we have done in our lives has prepared us intrinsically for our work in the church. Myself for example, what all went into preparing me to be minister of this church? I've be a son, a brother, a grandson, a nephew, a cousin, a friend, a best friend, a student, a musician, a retail clerk in an automotive store and a hardware store, an assistant manager in a steakhouse, an immigrant, a divorcee, a husband, and a father. Those relationships are where I learned the relational skills necessary for this call. I've been a seminarian, a minister in small town West Virginia, and a presbyter in West Virginia. My work as a minister there necessitated that I get steeped in the area of congregational redevelopment and as a presbyter there I was exposed to the nature and needs of small churches and started looking in that direction. Finally, I'm a Doctor of the Ministry which means I'm qualified to teach and have an expert opinion on the relationship between theology and congregational redevelopment. My whole life has been Holy Spirit school preparing me for who I am and what I do here and through who I am and what I do here the Holy Spirit is preparing and gifting me for what comes next.

Now with respect to your each, I would encourage you to look at who you are and what you've done and are doing with your life and ask how the Holy Spirit has been preparing you for work in the Kingdom. I titled this sermon *Leaving Everything* and I haven't really said anything on that topic until now. The highest priority of our lives is being a Christian. The life of Christ is in us each and through us every relationship we find ourselves in. Being a Christian, being a living proclamation that Jesus is Lord is our number one priority. This priority affects what we do with our lives and how we prioritize them. Who those first

## “Leaving Everything”

four were and what they did as fisherman along with time spent with Jesus prepared and gifted them for what they would be doing for his church and churches. Take this thought home with you: through every relationship of your life and everything you have done and are doing the Holy Spirit has been preparing and gifting you for the ministry of preparing and casting the net of the gospel through this congregation. The crown of your lives isn't who you are or what you do at work, at home, or at school. It's who you are and what you do with your brothers and sisters in Christ and our work together that Christ has called us to in his kingdom. The crown of our live is who we are as Christians and what we do in Christ's kingdom. Everything else is just preparation. Amen.