

In the Gospel of Mark things move along very rapidly, and a lot can happen from one verse to the next. For example: in the first chapter the first verse reads, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Then there are two verses quoted from the prophet Isaiah about the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord. In verse four John the baptizer appears and proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In verse five people from Jerusalem and Judea were going to the Jordan river to be baptized by John. In verse six there’s a description of what John was wearing and eating – which bore an uncanny resemblance to the prophet Elijah. Then in verses seven and eight, John proclaimed someone greater than him was coming who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. In verse nine Jesus comes from Nazareth to be baptized by John. Verses ten and eleven describe: the heavens being torn apart; the Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus; and a voice from heaven declaring, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And immediately after that, in verses twelve and thirteen, the Spirit whisked Jesus away to the wilderness for forty days. There he was tempted by Satan, hung out with the wild beasts, and was waited on by angels.

And it is a good thing that we already know those forty days have passed when we get to verse fourteen, because sometime in those forty days John the baptizer was arrested. **HE WAS ARRESTED?!** And just like that (**SNAP!**) being baptized in the Jordan by John is no longer a thing! **NOBODY** is doing that anymore! . . . But then Jesus comes to Galilee, fresh from his time in the wilderness, to proclaim the good news of God by saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” – Buckle up and hang on, kids! The Gospel of Mark has just shifted gears and stepped down on the accelerator. If you were uneasy about how fast we were going before, now it’s all going to look like a blur!

In verse sixteen we’re picking up speed going into the curve by the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus sees two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea. . . . Consider what kind of greeting **YOU** might shout out to people that you see fishing. Maybe it would be something like, “I hope you fill your net!” . . . But what does Jesus say to the fishermen? Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Now when you hear that does it make you think, “Haul your net out of the water and come with me! I’ll show you how to use that net to catch people!” Because that is **EXACTLY** what it sounds like to me. And I am mystified how Simon and Andrew could have heard something else in those words that compelled them to “immediately” **DROP** their nets and leave them behind, in order to start following Jesus. I mean, had the fishing been *that bad* that day? Or was there just something *about* Jesus, or how he said what he said, that was so totally magnetic that Simon and Andrew were drawn to him?

But the Gospel of Mark gives us no time to wonder about this because in verses nineteen and twenty Jesus sees two other brothers who are fishermen, and Jesus “immediately” calls them. And James and John go to follow Jesus – leaving their father, Zebedee, in the fishing boat with the hired men. What did Jesus say to them? Was it, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people”? Or did Jesus say something else? Did Zebedee NOT say anything to his sons before they left? Did James and John not even say goodbye to their father? . . . We don’t know! So much, and yet so little, is included in these four verses where Jesus called his first four disciples.

When we read the Gospel of Mark it can feel like we’ve jumped right into everyday life with Jesus. Sort of like taking our own “*Quantum Leap*” and there isn’t time to reflect on what is happening right NOW because there’s too much going on that we have to take in right NOW! It’s almost impossible to understand how important something might be while we’re struggling to just keep up. So we hear Jesus say, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” – but then he’s already saying, “repent, and believe in the good news” – while we’re still looking around in hopes of seeing **where** the kingdom of God is so near to us! When everything is ALL news to us – how can we know what Jesus thinks is THE “good” news? And with everything moving so fast that we don’t have time to think – how can we truly repent of anything? Or know what to believe? It just feels like too much, too fast! . . . And how in the world were Simon, Andrew, James, and John able to make the life changing decision to follow Jesus and learn how to fish for people, while keeping up with Jesus in real time?

Deep down it really troubles us how the Gospel of Mark makes it sound like Simon, Andrew, James, and John willingly spun their lives around in a completely new direction all lickety-split like that. Who would do something like that?! Sure Jesus asked them to use their experience and skills with fishing in a different context, for a different purpose. But would we unquestioningly embrace following Jesus so we could use the skills and experience that we already have and apply them in a whole new way? Does that sound exciting or frightening to us? . . . Maybe it depends on whether we really thrive on new challenges or if we struggle with change! . . . But maybe part of the good news is that Jesus calls each of us to respond in our own unique way. And we can respond not just right NOW, but also through a lifetime of discipleship. We can grow in our response as we mature in our relationship with God; as our faith deepens; as we witness how the Holy Spirit is at work in, and through, and around us. The good news is that life in Christ, eternal life with God, and the liveliness of the Holy Spirit are always constantly available to us. The time is always NOW if we want to repent and reconnect with the source of life, to be part of the living, breathing work of God.

We know that the psalmist would tell us to, “Trust in God at all times, O people”; and that the Gospel of Mark would tell us to do so “immediately”! But it is up to us to decide. Will we believe in the good news and put our full trust in God and follow Jesus? Amen.