

The First Reading is Psalm 62:5-12

⁵ For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God. ⁶ God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; ***I shall not be shaken.*** ⁷ On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, ***my refuge is in God.*** ⁸ ***Trust in God at all times,*** O people; pour out your heart before him; ***God is a refuge for us.*** ⁹ Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances, they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰ Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. ¹¹ Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, ¹² and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

This psalmist's mooring is secure. The psalmist even says, "I shall not be shaken." The psalmist encourages the people of God to trust in God at all times. Not just when things are good, but when things are difficult. This demonstrates incredible confidence in God. The psalmist names God descriptively: God is a rock, a mighty rock, a fortress, and a refuge. Deliverance, salvation, honor, and hope rests in God alone for the psalmist. What about you? How would you describe the God whom you worship and serve? How secure is your mooring in this God? Are you easily shaken or not? Are you secure in God, trusting in God's steadfast love? Do you trust the power that belongs to God alone and not to the world, its principalities, or powers?

As we enter the gospel reading for today, Jesus' moorings are firm, for the text begins on an ominous note, "Now after John was arrested..." yet, Jesus is not shaken. Jesus knew of John's ministry in the wilderness, for people from the whole Judean countryside and from Jerusalem were going into the wilderness to be baptized by John. Repent, turn back to God was John's clarion call to those he baptized. His baptism didn't point to himself, but to the One who was to come. Jesus himself went into the wilderness to be baptized by John. Yet, John's effort to prepare the way was thwarted, for he was arrested by Herod and imprisoned. Even so, Jesus, the One who was to come, did not hesitate to begin his public ministry. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled" and immediately went to work. Listen now for God's word to us through Mark's Gospel.

The Second Reading Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "***Follow me*** and *I will make you fish for people.*" ¹⁸ And ***immediately*** they left their nets and ***followed*** him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ ***Immediately*** he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and ***followed*** him.

When was the last time you did something immediately? When was the last time someone invited you to do something and you immediately dropped everything and went? My suspicion is that immediately is not a normal pattern for many of us. We would rather weigh our options and get back to the invitee then make an immediate decision and say yes. I know I

did so, when I was invited to the ESRI presentation last week. I checked in with my husband and made sure the way was clear. Then I said, “Yes,” and enjoyed an informative presentation about the San Manuel Mission Indians. Yes, immediately is not our normal pattern, especially given the type of invitation outlined in our gospel story this morning.

Now imagine that you are on the job. It doesn't matter whether you are a fisherman, a certified nurse's assistant, an accountant, a lawyer, or anything else. Just imagine that you are on the job, whatever you consider your job to be at this present moment in your life – it could be as a golfer! Yet, someone walks up to you and presents a compelling invitation, saying “Follow me.”

Can't you just hear your twenty questions or excuses as to why “immediately” is not in your vocabulary? Where I am following you to? Let, me finish what I am doing. What will we be doing? I can't go right now as I have an appointment I need to keep. How long will this take? Can you come back tomorrow? When will we be back? I have to go and take care of my banking. Who is going to pay for this? What are we going to eat? I'm sure you have thought of a few more questions or excuses by now, too.

In this day and age, it is really hard to do anything immediately, given the amount of information available to us in Nano seconds. I imagine that if Jesus came to a 21st century James and John, one of them would break away and do a quick internet search to check out his credentials. Who is this guy and why should I follow him? Of course, the Gospel of Mark doesn't have much of a back story. It simply begins, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” We have a few words from Isaiah and then John the baptizer appears. The audience knows that Jesus has been baptized and driven to the wilderness, but we are not sure what Simon and Andrew, and James and John know.

The text simply doesn't tell us. This guy just passes along the Sea of Galilee as Simon and Andrew are fishing and he says to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they drop everything and follow! The text doesn't even record what Jesus said to James and John. We only know what happens next, “They immediately left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Jesus.”

These four made immediate decisions that changed the trajectory of their lives. Rather than going to their homes that night, these four followed Jesus to Capernaum. Now if you have been to the Sea of Galilee, you would know that Capernaum is probably not that far from where these four might have been fishing or repairing their nets. If the four were in Tiberius near its small harbor, then it was about a six and half mile walk to Capernaum. It may not have been far, but it was a commitment to immediately follow, to leave everything known, familiar and routine.

This is exactly where the church in the 21st century finds itself today. Jesus is asking us to follow. Jesus is asking us to immediately leave behind everything known, familiar and routine. Yet, immediately, is not in a church's vocabulary either. Jesus asks us to follow, even if we don't know where Jesus will lead us. Notice that Jesus asks us to follow in order to reach others – I will make you fishers of people. Jesus is not so much interested in keeping us comfortable, safe and secure. He asked his disciples to follow, even though he was repeatedly getting chased out of synagogues and even towns.

“The time is fulfilled,” said Jesus, “and the kingdom of God has drawn near.” Now is the time to repent. Now is the time to trust in God. Now is the time not to be shaken, even though now is the time for leaving the known, the familiar, and the routine.

Simon, Andrew, James and John responded immediately to Jesus’ now. What about us?

Let me share with you two books, one I recently completed and one that I am still reading through. The first is entitled, “Autopsy of a Deceased Church.” The second is recommended reading for our Presbytery’s LEaD event on February 24th entitled, “Canoeing the Mountains.”

The first book authored by Dr. Thom Rainer was birthed from a blog post he wrote by the same title. His blog post became one of his most viewed posts, because it struck a chord. He begins his book this way, “I knew the patient before she died. It was ten years ago. She was very sick at the time, but she didn’t want to admit it... I told her bluntly yet compassionately that she was dying. Yet, she was in denial and was angry in her denial.” She, of course, was a church. A church that was probably born out of a vision, but a church that no longer was willing to follow Jesus. A church no longer willing to leave everything known, familiar and routine to fish for people. A church no longer willing to change, even though the world around it had changed dramatically.

The Church with a capital “C” in America is at a major cross road. As Todd Bolsinger writes, “We must change or die.” Christendom is dead, as the Church with a capital “C,” no longer dominates society. Today the Church with a capital “C” is often deemed irrelevant or worse not even noticed, given the smorgasbord of activities available during traditional church hours.

The church with a little “c” mentioned in Rainer’s opening chapter, chose death even as they desperately clung to life as they knew it. Here are some of the symptoms that signaled her impending death: the past was her hero, the church did not engage the community, the budget met mainly internal needs, the great commission was the great omission – they no longer identified themselves as fishers of people, the church was preference driven, they rarely prayed together, facility issues were more important than people issues, and they had no clear purpose other than keep things the same. This book didn’t do an autopsy on only one church though; the author saw these same symptoms in multiple churches that chose death rather than follow Jesus. That said no thank you to Jesus, rather than respond to Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me.” And most churches do at the beginning. Churches begin with a vision of fishing for people in their respective communities. Yet, somewhere along the way churches that die lose sight of their reason for being.

“I will make you fishers of people,” said Jesus to Simon and Andrew, James and John. Yet, fishing for people is quite a bit different than fishing for fish. For those who fish, they know that fishing requires some basic tools today, namely a rod, some line and lures. All of the equipment is designed for what type of fish you are hoping to catch. It takes a different type of rod, line and lure to catch a large mouth bass than it does to catch a sea going tuna. The lures are designed to mimic what is naturally eaten, only to the surprise of the fish that gets hooked and reeled in. So, fishing, as we know it, is probably not the best metaphor for us as we imagine our identity as fishers of people, for we don’t want to lure anyone. We want to invite others to come and see as the Gospel of Luke writes. We want others to experience God as a refuge, a

rock and a fortress. We want others to be delivered, to receive honor and know themselves to be loved, and to be anchored in hope.

But, the analogy of fishing has something to teach us, for I suggest that our fishing equipment is antiquated. It is not designed for the environment of today. All of our equipment is best suited for a time and a place that no longer exists. Attraction models of church – our buildings and programs – no longer draw others into our midst, for we live in a culture that views institutions, even churches, with suspicion. We can't wait for fish, people that is, to come to us as they use to do, we have to go to where the fish, the people are swimming.

Bolsinger's subtitle for his book *Canoeing the Mountains* is this: *Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territories*. He uses the example of Lewis and Clark who were commissioned to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean. Of course, we know, they didn't find a water route; instead they found the Rocky Mountains! In order to continue their expedition, they had to leave behind all that was known, familiar and routine. They had to drop their canoes, their old fishing equipment and venture into uncharted territories.

"Follow me," said Jesus. But will we dare to follow? Bolsinger writes, "Our greatest successes in the past are actually our greatest problems today, because what worked the best in the past will not work today." What we know, what is familiar, and what is routine for us will not enable us to fish for people today. The world outside of the safety of these walls is uncharted territory.

I know it would be wonderful if this pastor of yours with one year of experience with you had all the answers, but in fact expecting that of me is the Christendom model that is past and gone. I don't have the map of the uncharted territories before us. I wish I did, but I don't. None of us do.

The only certainty is that we can trust God. We can trust that God goes before us and will go with us into the uncharted territory of the 21st century culture that continues to change at light speed. God will be our refuge as we navigate what feels like towering mountains. God will be our rock as we attempt "immediate," even if we stumble and fall and then get back up again.

The psalmist's mooring was secure? Jesus' mooring was secure? Is ours?

We are fishers of people! We are to invite others to experience God's steadfast love. We can't do that if we stay safely in this fishing lodge and only hang out with each other telling stories of a previous big catch. Simon, Andrew, James and John, immediately left everything behind to follow Jesus. Will we dare to follow Jesus into the uncharted territory of this 21st century? I pray so. Amen.