

Immediately

Mark 1:14-20 (January 24, 2021)

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

Historical Context

In the Middle Ages the clergy was considered a higher status of Christian than laypersons. They had their own regimen of frequent daily worship that laypersons didn’t have. They had church rules to follow, which laypersons didn’t have. They usually lived in communities — monasteries and convents — unlike laypersons. The Reformation eliminated those distinctions between clergy and laypersons by affirming that God calls everybody. The word for this call to everyone is “vocation,” from Latin *vocatio*, “calling.” Thus, God not only calls us to follow Jesus, but also calls us into the fields and careers of our lives.

Theme: Immediately

What is most striking in the calling of the disciples according to Mark is not the “follow me,” not the calling, but the immediately. “Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

“Immediately” can be less about marking time and more about describing action. Immediately does not only designate a when but a what. Not only a place in time, but an event that changes the meaning of life. Granted, the disciples have no clue at this point how life has been changed. But we know. And maybe immediately is all we can do, all we can manage. Because, preparation? Maybe it makes matters worse. Builds up anticipation, expectations. And then, when things do not go as planned?

Maybe a life of faith can only happen in immediately, in the surprising, sudden, profound epiphany of God at work, God revealed in our lives.

Because if we think we can adequately prepare for God’s epiphanies, that we can be fully ready for what we will see, well then, God might be less than epiphanous. We are called, perhaps not so much to follow, but to take Mark’s immediately seriously. This is not, “wait a few minutes. Let me pack my bag. I have a few more arrangements to make.” No — epiphanies just happen. No preparation. No packing list. No recommendations of what to take, what to do.

And so, Jesus just happens. On the shores of the Sea of Galilee. No time to think. No invitation to take your time. Just go. Here is truly epiphany according to Mark. Epiphanies are untamable and unpredictable. Unexpected and, at times, undeserved. When we place our emphasis on the immediately we are directed more toward the event and less on the how.