

**Called where we are**  
**Epiphany 3**  
**28 January 2018**  
**Revd Jenny Wilkens**  
**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**  
**1 Corinthians 7:29-31**  
**Mark 1:14-20**



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Do you ever wonder as we hear the familiar story of the call of the disciples, whether Mark has only recorded half the story? Pause and think for a moment, if Jesus were to come to your home or workplace this week, knock on the door and say “Follow me!”, what would your response be? If it’s anything like mine, it would probably be “Yes, but...”! Closely followed by a whole list of questions a bit like, “Who are you and just where are you going that you want me to follow along?” “What’s your plan and how do I fit into it?” “Why are you calling *me* in particular?” “Who else have you invited?” “What happens to my family, my workmates, my business and all the people it supports?” And then “Once we catch these people you’re teaching us to fish for, what on earth are we supposed to do with them?”!

We know that Mark’s gospel style is sparse and spare, fast paced, full of verbs and his favourite phrase seems to be ‘*kai euthus*’ ‘and immediately’. Jesus speaks in verbs, imperatives: repent, believe, follow. The disciples respond in verbs, they left, they followed. It all seems a bit ‘slick’. Was it really that simple, that straightforward?

I think I’m more comfortable with Luke’s call story in Luke 5 where Jesus gives fishing instructions to the bunch of fishermen, and Simon engages in a bit of argy-bargy with Jesus about who of the two of them *actually* knows about fishing, before acquiescing and then being overwhelmed with awe at both a huge catch of fish, and the authority and creative power of the one who stands before him. This story is reflected in the hymn we’ll sing a little later on from the Iona Community: ‘James and Andrew, Peter and John’. I like the camaraderie and rivalry of verse 2: “Jesus, you’re only a carpenter’s son...but ours the skill to harvest the deep”.

And yet this reminded me that if indeed Jesus was a carpenter’s son from inland Nazareth, he came and sought out those fishermen by the

lake and then spoke to them in a language they could resonate with and respond to. He framed their call in a way that honoured who they were and what their life experience and existing skills were, and then said, I'm going to build on those, and use you to bring harvest in the lives of people.

I have always loved that the word Mark uses (1 v.19) for James and John **mending their nets, katartizo**, is the same word used in Ephesians 4:12 of the call of church leaders to **equip** God's people for works of service.

It's like the mending, restoring, repairing process goes on in us, that we may then share in God's work of bringing healing and restoration to others. I guess we become less hole-y, full of holes, as we grow more holy and whole in Christ. And one way this happens is by being part of the net together. It makes me think of knitting and watching some of the expert knitters in our craft group fixing a small hole, so that the whole garment is made complete. In the same way, the body of Christ becomes more whole, more networked, more stitched together in love as we share life through better or worse. This is what Jesus was offering his disciples and still offers us today.

That is a fulfilling call, and we can imagine too the draw and excitement of leaving behind the boredom of the more repetitive side of day to day life and work, for them, the smell and mess of fish; for us, the housework, the lawns, the emails and bills and deadlines. But hang on a minute, what did Zebedee think of his two sons up and leaving him in the boat? At least there were hired men to pick up the slack, and the business must have been of a size that he could afford to hire extra help.

But we don't hear that of Simon and Andrew, and later in this same chapter (Mk 1:30) we hear that Simon has a mother in law so presumably a wife and perhaps children as well. Here lies the mystery of the things we don't find out about in the gospel. Later in Mark 10:29,30 we hear Jesus' recognition of this cost of discipleship when he promises: 'there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life'.

Last week we were in John's gospel, and that sheds some light on the possible relationships of those early disciples. It seems from John 1:35 that a number of those who followed Jesus were first of all disciples of John the Baptist, and indeed some think Jesus himself may first have

been John's disciple, stepping forth into public ministry only after baptism by John and then John's arrest. Mark hints at this by mentioning John's arrest (v14), only then does Jesus announce that 'the time is fulfilled' (v15) – the Kairos moment of God's initiative and action, the drawing near of God's reign incarnated in Jesus.

So John's gospel suggests there may already have been friendships and relationships among these disciples of John, including with Jesus. But still, sometimes it's harder when you've grown up with someone or rubbed shoulders with them for a while and think you know someone well, to hear something brand new from them, something unexpected, a challenge to take the relationship to a new level and in a new direction, a call to follow his lead.

While Mark portrays this as something Jesus' new disciples do willingly and without problem, yet the rest of his Gospel will not flinch from showing that it wasn't always an easy ride, the times the disciples argued with each other, lacked faith or failed miserably, culminating in the disciples' desertion of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mk 14:50), Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial.

But yet at the Cross we see the faithfulness of the women who 'used to *follow* him and *ministered* to him' (14:41) – discipleship words. Those same women after the resurrection are given the words that will bring such hope: 'Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' (16:7) Mark takes us back to Galilee, to the place of their calling, to reveal Jesus risen, alive, calling them anew into his service.

So may these deeper resonances of Mark's gospel give us hope and encouragement as we spend this year in Mark's gospel, the gospel of action, of verbs, but also the gospel of mending nets, of bringing healing, of the long haul of discipleship, of Jesus' faithfulness through it all, never giving up on his disciples.

And a final note, you may wonder why we heard just a tantalising extract from the wonderful whale of a tale of Jonah this morning as well. I'd encourage you to find that small book of the Bible and read it in total, just four chapters, as it encapsulates so beautifully the vagaries and ups and downs of discipleship. Jonah is such a comfort to us in his humanity – God calls, Jonah runs in the other direction. Things get a bit fishy for a while, but God calls again and this time Jonah does what he's asked. Not with terribly good grace, though, then things get even worse as Jonah throws a full scale paddy when he thinks God is being too merciful and forgiving for his liking. Read it and be encouraged. God still calls disciples today, may we follow, where we are and as we are to God's glory. Amen.