

## **“Come Walk With Me” Mark 1:16-20**

“Come walk with me!”

Those words can be the greatest invitation or the greatest threat!

Let me explain.

If I came home from the office early on a sunny afternoon and Lise greeted me with those words, “Come walk with me!” I would be delighted.

Several years ago our children, Peter, Amanda and Cole, called up and asked if I would walk with them on the West Coast Trail. You know my answer was a very happy “Yes!”

35 years ago Lise and I asked each other that question, though we used different words. Instead of saying, “Come walk with me,” we said words like this, “Lise, I promise before God, our family and friends, to be your loving and faithful husband, to share my life with you, for richer and poorer, in sickness and in health, through joy and sorrow, as long as we both shall live.” Can you hear it? I was asking Lise to come walk with me through life, and she said “Yes!”

But those words, “Come walk with me” can also be, well, not so pleasant! Of course none of you ever experienced this, but when the principal at the school said to us, “Come walk with me” it never ended well.

Or if your boss marches into your office and says, “Come walk with me” and he or she is not smiling, you know trouble lies ahead.

Our text this morning tells of Jesus approaching four fishermen with this invitation, “Come walk with me.” His exact words were, “Come follow me.” What did this mean?

Mark’s Gospel begins with this amazing declaration: “The beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. “ A new day has dawned and it is ushered in by the coming of Jesus.

Mark records no birth narratives, no glimpses into Jesus’ childhood, just the sudden appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness baptising people to prepare them for the coming of God’s Anointed One. John’s message is one of repentance, a call to turn back to God after going astray. It is a term that is associated with the exile, and is a call to come home after walking away from God. Jesus will pick up the same theme, saying, “The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (v 15).

What was the good news? That God had come in Jesus to fulfill all the promises he had made of deliverance and salvation. Mark will follow closely the prophecies in Isaiah, and they will shape the way he tells the story of Jesus. Read carefully the first fifteen verses of Mark’s Gospel and you will know who Jesus is – God come to save His people. By verse 16 the scene is set. Jesus is

here to usher in the kingdom of God for those who will believe. His life moves towards the Heavenly Father and he invites people to come walk with him.

Who does Jesus call?

First he calls Simon, and then his brother Andrew. Where does he meet them? In the Temple? At a religious rally? No, he meets them by the Sea of Galilee where they are fishing. That is their trade. They are not religious trained men, not even formally educated men. They are common, hard working, tradesmen who were likely trained by their fathers, who were trained by their fathers, and so on.

James and John are also fishermen, trained by their father Zebedee, employed in the family business.

In chapter 2 Jesus will call Matthew, also known as Levi, to walk with him. He is a tax collector. In chapter 3 we read how Jesus selects a total of twelve men to be his disciples. All of them are ordinary, common men.

Is there a message in this? Can it be we need no special training or background or degrees or position to walk with Jesus? Can it be that ordinary people like you and me can be the disciples of Jesus? If you read ahead through the Gospel, which I suggest you may want to do as we spend the next ten weeks in the Gospel of Mark, you will discover that these men are anything but perfect. Hot headed, selfish, slow to understand at times, forgetful, arrogant on occasions, childish at times, Jesus collected a very interesting assortment of men to be his followers. There also seems to be a wider circle that includes a number of women, who also walk with Jesus. They also are an interesting group, including a woman who once had seven demons!

Jesus seemed less concerned about a person's past, their abilities or character. He simply wanted to know what their response was to the invitation, "Come walk with me."

That is true today. Jesus is not passing out examination papers to see who qualifies to walk with him. He does not check your bank account, or the certificates hanging on your wall. He does not even do a police check, or check your references. He simply says, "Come walk with me" and waits to see how you will respond. He knows that the longer you walk with Him the more your life will be changed, for the good. Evil tempers and selfish pride will be transformed into loving patience as we walk with Jesus.

This morning, this is great news for all of us. The "good news about Jesus" Mark refers to in verse one of this chapter includes the wonderful truth that everyone is invited to walk with Jesus. Jesus will throw out a great net to see who will be drawn into the kingdom. You and I are invited to "Come, walk with Jesus."

What is your response? Before we heard Jesus' invitation, we were walking away from God, away from Jesus, away from the abundant life God desires for each one of us. Now you have heard that Jesus is calling you to come, walk with him. What is your response?

You must know that there is a cost to following him. In Luke 14:25-35 Jesus speaks of counting the cost of being his disciple. Everyone is invited, but not all are ready to count the cost. Many have not trusted the fact that though we give everything away to follow Jesus, we gain so much more.

Look at those first disciples we read about in Mark chapter 1: Simon, Andrew, James and John.

Jesus says to “come follow me” (v. 17). But Jesus never intended for his disciples to walk several paces behind and simply walk in his shadow. Jesus wants to walk with his disciples as a friend, as he once walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. “Come walk with me...”

To walk with Jesus, to become a follower, means we must trust Jesus. Lise and I were watching “The Chosen” this week, and in the episode we watched, children were attracted to Jesus. One little girl, Abigail, is drawn to Jesus and she in turn brings her friends to meet Jesus. One of the older boys asks, “What if he is a bad man? Will he hurt us?”

Abigail’s answer was simple, “He is a good man. We can trust him.”

When people hear Jesus invite them to walk with him, they must also decide if they trust Jesus with their lives. Jesus does not ask for a part time commitment. He does not say, “Walk with me on Sunday and go your own way on Monday through Saturday.” He does not say, “Walk with me at church but do your own thing at school, or at work.” No, if we are followers of Jesus we are either “all in,” or we are still walking in the wrong direction.

One of the gifts God gives us is His Holy Spirit, who starts to work in your life long before you say “Yes” to Jesus’ invitation to “Come, follow me.” It is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to see the goodness of God, the love of God shown to us in Jesus, and the price he was willing to pay to rescue us.

As the Apostle Paul says, “If God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us – won’t he also give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

The more you get to know Jesus the more you will understand what love is, and how God loves you. Jesus willingly went to the cross and died there in your place – that is love. So if Jesus loves us that much, certainly we can trust him to lead our lives.

Which leads to the second point. Jesus will lead us where we should go – not always where we want to go. People really struggle with this today, for they want to be the captain of their own lives, and steer their lives where they want to go without consulting God. They want to date whoever they want to date, without asking God. They want to take the job they want without asking God. They want to live where they like without asking God. We say we trust God and know he loves us, but when he leads us, we do not always follow.

Our natural tendency is to look out for number one – that is ourselves. But Jesus often calls us to put others ahead of ourselves. When I hear of people who put off buying a much needed car so they can send that money to people in need, I know God has been working in those people’s

lives. The world will not understand someone doing such things, but those walking with Jesus “get it.”

Those who walk with Jesus know they have a new master. Once their own appetites ruled their lives. Whatever they wanted became priority #1. Now Jesus is Lord, and doing what honours him is most important. When Lise and I started dating, she wanted to know if I was serious about following Jesus. She had determined she would not date someone who was not a Christian. She had broken off a relationship with someone because he was not a Christian, for she could see his values were not the same as hers. They were walking in opposite directions. I really admired her for her commitment to put Jesus first.

To follow Jesus, we sometimes have to give up some things as well.

Look at these fishermen. To follow Jesus, to walk with him, they would have to walk away from their nets, their family, the life they were comfortable with. They knew fishing. They knew how to handle a boat. They knew how to sell fish. Now Jesus was inviting them to become “fishers of men.” What did that look like?

What happens right after Jesus calls the fishermen to follow him? They go to a synagogue and there they are confronted by a man who has a demon in him. Jesus casts out the demon, and the people are amazed. No doubt the disciples are also amazed. Is this what they gave their nets up for – to face demons?

Then Jesus goes to Simon’s house, where his mother-in-law is sick. Jesus heals her, which is great, but then everyone in town comes to be healed by Jesus. Crowds press in, not so much desiring to walk with Jesus as to receive a healing. When Jesus slips away for solitude and prayer, the disciples have to deal with this demanding crowd. Is this what they gave up their boats and nets for?

Then Jesus heals a leper. That sounds great to us, but the disciples, those fishermen, were told all their lives to stay far away from lepers – and Samaritans – and tax collectors. Jesus was turning everything upside down. Every prejudice the disciples grew up with is confronted by Jesus’ embrace of all people. Is this what they signed up for?

Some people are not willing to count the cost. A promising young man walked away from Jesus’ invitation to walk with him. Why? He could not let go of his riches. He could not trust Jesus. To walk with Jesus we must let go of everything and receive back only what he gives us.

Jesus calls for a total commitment. “Take up your cross and follow me.”

Jesus said to Simon, Andrew, James and John, “Come walk with me.”

Simon said “yes.” Andrew said “yes.” James said “Yes.” John said “Yes.” What is your response to Jesus’ invitation to “Come, walk with me?” Are you ready to count the cost? This will be a walk that will last a lifetime, and it will be the greatest adventure you could ever imagine. What do you say to Jesus’ invitation today, “Come walk with me”?