

Sermon Notes: January 21-22, 2011

Title: *Look Around*

Theme: *You'd like to share the good news, but you don't know anyone who isn't a Christian already? Look through these lenses and, you'll discover that you're surrounded daily by people Jesus died to reach through you.*

Text: Mark 1:14-20 (Originally we suggested 16-20, but the periscope begins with vs. 14)

Notes on the text

Mark tells us that John has been arrested. A better translation of the Greek is that he has been "delivered up". This is the same word that Mark uses when he says that Jesus is "delivered up" for crucifixion, further connecting the destinies of John and Jesus. Now Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the good news of God. The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come or draws near. Jesus' call of engagement in God's rule is present in two imperatives. The first is a call "to repent", a call that carries a sense of immediacy. It is now a time to turn around, to change one's mind in response to the call of discipleship. This call is followed up with a second imperative "to believe," which expresses a continuing response to the obedience of following. The object of believing is "the good news" of God's reign present in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (1:15).

What follows in verses 16-20 is an example of the immediacy of this call. Jesus seems to be merely strolling the shores of the Sea of Galilee and as he does he spots a very common scene on those shores – two fishermen casting their nets (Simon and Andrew). Jesus invitation is both common and uncommon. "Follow me" was the typical invitation of a Rabbi to students. Calling these fishermen to become "fishers of men" is most uncommon. But what is even more extraordinary is the response of these fishermen. They immediately drop their nets and follow Jesus. We are given no indication why or what's happening inside their heads. Perhaps this points to the power of Jesus' call. Perhaps these men had met Jesus before. Rob Bell suggests that the call to be a student of a Rabbi was extended only to "the best of the best" and the fact that these men were working the trade of their fathers meant that they had been less than stellar students. Bell suggests that these fishermen responded immediately because they did not want to miss out on such an honor and extraordinary opportunity. The scene repeats with two more fishermen, James and John, who were mending their nets. They, too, immediately follow Jesus.

Preaching Possibilities

At least three points of connection with this text help us in our current series. First, Jesus finds disciples in the midst of an ordinary day. Second, Jesus calls very ordinary people to be his disciples. Fishermen were not exactly the "cream of the crop" in society, but Jesus isn't looking

for those who think they have it all together. He is looking for those who are willing to turn their lives around to follow, and dare to believe in the One they are following. Third, there is power in the call. In Jesus God's reign has broken into this world, and the King has authority over our lives. The invitation to follow is a sheer gift that comes without warning and it is the Spirit's job to turn hearts, not ours.

One of the most common complaints of Christians who are considering reaching over the fence and into someone else's life is, "I don't know anyone who isn't a Christian. All my friends belong to my church." Here are two interesting statistics:

- 1) A survey done by sociologists Glock and Stark found that among evangelicals, over 1/2 of their close friends are likely to belong to the same congregation, whereas among liberal churchgoers, such as Presbyterians and Congregationalists, few or none of their close friends are likely to be members of their local church.
- 2) Pollsters report that 72 percent of Americans don't know their next-door neighbors.

Put together I think these statistics point to great opportunity, if we're willing to open our eyes and move beyond our current sphere of influence. Ever buy a new car and suddenly notice that everyone else seems to have bought the same car? When our eyes are opened we see things we have never seen before, and I think that's true with seeing people to whom God is calling us to build a bridge.

A pastor friend from Ohio once taught me that we tend to see people in one of three ways. First, they are scenery. They merely fill the background of our lives and don't really see them at all. Second, they are object. They are means to an end. The cashier at the market is merely a means to the end of my shopping. A waitress is merely a means of my getting my meal. Third, they are people. We know their name. Our stories are known and intertwined. If we're going to be obedient to Jesus' command we're going to need to stop seeing people as scenery and objects and begin to see them as people.

So, where do we look for those whom God might be calling us to connect to? I'll suggest four options or lenses to consider:

- 1) Proximity – Where do you hang out? Where are you on a regular basis? Bars, restaurants, coffee shops, grocery store, gas station....
- 2) Affinity – What do you love to do...and who could you do it with?
- 3) Service – Whose needs can you meet...and with whom can you meet them?
- 4) Pain – How can God redeem your pain to reach others?

In my experience looking through these lenses reveals all sorts of relational possibilities.