

Mark 1:16-20 - Come, follow me

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[0 : 00] Ramona is going to come and read God's word for us. Steve's already said we're going to read from 1 Mark 16 to 20. As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people. At once they left the nets and followed him. When they had gone a little further, he saw James, son of Sebedee, and his brother John in a boat preparing the nets.

Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Sebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. This is the word of God. Thanks so much, Ramona.

Let's pray and ask for the Lord's help as we come to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're just so conscious together of our need to hear you speak.

There are many things to distract us, to turn our hearts away from you. There's lots of competing voices that we've heard in the week. So we pray now that you just might quieten our hearts, that we might hear you, that you might speak to us from your word, by your spirit.

[1 : 26] Please, Lord, be at work in me. Be at work in all of us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you keep that passage open, we shall try and work our way through it.

It's a very simple story, one that you might be familiar with if you have looked at the Bible before. I think as we come this morning and you think about the idea of following somebody, I reckon if you try and summarize what our contemporary idea of following is, you would say something like the phrase, like and, oh my goodness, subscribe.

Right? Don't you do that? Isn't that the thing that we hear all the time at the end of every YouTube video? If you're a particular committed follower, you might like, subscribe, hit the bell icon, become a channel member.

If you're really serious, you might buy some merch as well. This is how it works, isn't it, in our culture now. We stumble across people and things that we are interested in, that intrigue us, that wow us, that teach us something, and we click to say that we're interested in following.

We are going to pick up what they put down. I suppose you might say that we become a disciple of theirs. Now, if you were to take that definition of follow into Mark 1, verse 17, when Jesus says, come, follow me, then our assumption would be that Jesus is reaching out to people who are, in some senses, intrigued by who he is.

[3 : 05] He's stumbling into people who have kind of come across him in whatever the first century equivalent of the algorithm was. Now, actually, it's fair to say that that sort of thing did happen, obviously not in an online way, but still, young people, predominantly young men, in want of a further education, would find themselves, especially in Jerusalem, scouting for a rabbi.

Somebody to follow, somebody to follow, people who would teach them and pass on their knowledge to them. And then these young men, predominantly, would attach themselves to the rabbi and follow them around as a kind of apprentice, learning their ideas and their philosophies to pass it on to the next generation.

And when you read Mark 1, you find, actually, that not only does Mark 1 contrast to our kind of like and subscribe culture, but actually Mark 1 stands in stark contrast to the culture of his day, too.

There are many surprises in these verses. Let me show you the first one. The first surprise here is that it is Jesus seeking people, not people seeking Jesus.

Did you notice that? In verse 16, you'll see this is what is happening. Jesus is the one walking by the lake, looking for people to follow him, not the other way around.

[4 : 28] Simon and Andrew in verse 16 and James and John in verse 19 are simply just getting on with their work. They're fishing. You know, this is not Jerusalem. These guys are not looking for an education.

This is Galilee, and these men are uneducated fishermen. The Sea of Galilee was teeming with fish. So many people had small family businesses catching and selling fish.

It's a job which is hard work. It's physically demanding. It requires a certain level of skill, preparation, and full concentration. It is not done by the people who are scouting for a rabbi, looking to apprentice.

Jesus. So as Mark sets the scene, he's very clear who's looking for who. Jesus is the searcher, and he is searching in a very unlikely place. Jesus is sort of contrasted, isn't he, to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, right?

They are fishing in a place that is teeming with fish. Jesus is fishing for people to follow him in the educational wilderness of his death. Now, I know that is obvious, isn't it?

[5 : 39] I've not shown you anything that you hadn't already seen or wouldn't have noticed. But let me just try and point out the significance of that truth for us. Theologically, this has massive consequences.

A friend of mine talks about what he says is the theology of the bus. I don't know whether you have that kind of idea, but it's a sort of popular theology. It's what everybody thinks, yeah?

The sort of assumed ideas of our age. And the theology of the bus, when it comes to seeking and following, is that somehow in our world, God is hiding.

And that if you're interested in knowing God, you have to go and look for him. We call the people who are especially keen to find God seekers, and churches run seeker-friendly services for them, or seeker courses.

And the thinking goes, you know, if you are one of those people who has managed to find God, well, then you're particularly lucky. Because lots of people are looking, and not many people seem to meet with success.

[6 : 45] But here, notice, Mark contradicts that idea. He flips that theology of the bus on its head. He says, we're not in a world of seekers looking for God. No, rather, we're in a world where God is seeking for people.

In other words, the story of the Bible, according to Mark here, his sort of assumption here is that humanity are hiding, not God. So much so that when God bursts onto the scene of human history, as we were thinking last week, he comes as one who seeks people.

Now, if you've read any of the Bible, you will know that Mark is absolutely right. Don't you? In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve in the garden, they eat the forbidden fruit, and God enters the stage.

He walks around the garden in the cool of the day. And what are Adam and Eve doing? Hiding. They're hiding. Desperately covering themselves over with leaves to hide their bodies from God and from one another.

God is the seeker. Humanity is hiding. And it goes on all the way through the Bible. God calls Abraham and Moses and David. It finds out that God is not looking in the most likely places, is he?

[7 : 56] He finds David who is out looking after sheep. He's overlooked even by his own father. And then the parables of Jesus, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the runaway son. God is seeking, not people.

Now, why would that be the case? Why does the Bible say that people aren't looking for God, but God is looking for people? What is wrong with humanity that would make us want to hide from the God who made us?

Well, of course, the Bible says that this hiding or running away is morally wrong, isn't it? You know, it's not a sort of just an ignorance of God.

It's a sort of moral hiding that we're doing. You know, we're not so much like the kid in Westfield who got lost. You know, I know when I said to you earlier that had anyone got lost and a number of you put your hand up.

I know I was lost as a kid, but I also once ran away as a kid. I said, well, I didn't actually say anything. I was fed up with my mum. And so I just left the house and ran away.

[9 : 02] I ran into the local woods. There was like a big concrete pipe. I hid in there for a few hours. It seemed like ages. And then got hungry, so went home. And that's what's going on here, isn't it?

It's not simply that, you know, we've kind of morally in a neutral way hidden ourselves from God. No, actually, we're on the run from God. In the story of the Bible, the reason that people aren't looking for God and are hiding from him is because we don't want to be found by God.

We understand intuitively, even if we don't acknowledge it, that we are not on good terms with God. And if he were to find us, well, we'd be undone. So we're scared, aren't we?

We're terrified of meeting him. It's guilt that makes us hide. And we might hide in lots of different ways. We hide by burying ourselves in work. We distract ourselves with entertainment. Some people even use religion to hide from God, hoping that if there's enough religious activity, God might not notice that actually we're living in his world for our own glory, that we've sullied our lives with a million immoral actions and base instincts.

See, here's Mark's penetrating idea for us this morning. Let me try and put it as bluntly as I can just to try and capture your attention. We don't want to find God because we don't want to be found out by him.

[10 : 23] Let me ask you if that's you this morning. Perhaps you've come to church and you sort of hope, listen, if I pay God a little bit of attention, if I turn up to church every now and again, maybe he'll do the kindness of leaving me alone for the rest of the week, will he?

Can I hide in plain sight? Or perhaps a few of you are sitting here uncomfortably and it's because you think God might find you in a place like this. It's scary.

Of course, that's only half the point, isn't it? The point is not simply that we're not looking for God. The point of the passage is that Jesus is looking for us. He's come for people. In last week's passage, if you remember last week's passage, we heard Jesus say that the kingdom of God was near and we should repent and believe the good news.

And we see here that Jesus is ensuring that his kingdom is going to be full of people because he is not waiting for them to come to him. He is going out calling them to follow him. And as we found, he looks in the most unlikely places, calling out to distracted fishermen who have no idea that they're casting their necks into the ocean, just a stone's throw away from God himself in human flesh.

Jesus is calling for followers, distracted fishermen and distracted Londoners. People who have no intention of looking for Jesus, but who find that Jesus is looking for them.

[11 : 46] And notice not to condemn them, but to save them. I think this is perhaps the best bit of the story here, isn't it? That Jesus is calling out with good news.

I know you don't want to be found out by God, but I am here to find you and rescue you. And a friend, I'm going to call her Mary, it's not really her name, but she was on the run from God.

She kind of knew she was, she was really self-conscious about it. She knew that she was running from the Lord. She'd heard the gospel as a child. She'd even made a profession of faith as a young person.

But now as an adult, she'd graduated from university. She'd got a good job. She was making quite a lot of money and she was out to live for herself. Bright, successful and rich.

She bought her own home away from churches and away from other Christians. It turns out that God was looking for her. And to her surprise, a new local church opened their doors just 100 yards from her house.

[12 : 58] Leaflets started coming through her door. An irritating pastor knocked on her door. Eventually, she started coming to church and was found by the Lord.

I remember speaking to her after a church service and we sort of chuckled together at the lengths that God had gone to to find her. You weren't looking for God, you were on the run. So he started another local church just at the end of your street in order to find you.

Maybe that's you this morning. The second surprise here, though, is that Jesus gets an immediate response to his call. Jesus' call gets an immediate response.

Throughout history, there have been lots of people who have doubted the divinity of Jesus. And often the fuel for their cause is that they say, well, Jesus never really claimed to be God.

You know, they scour the Gospels imagining that, you know, if I was God in flesh, right, I would be standing up and saying that all the time. It would be the thing that I would stand up and shout about on the street corner.

[14 : 03] And they discover that that's not exactly what Jesus does. And so they conclude that he can't be God. Alex O'Connor, if you know him, is someone who says this. Jehovah's Witnesses who knock on your door or stop you in the street, they will say that too.

But the fact is, they completely miss the point, don't they? Because not only does Jesus say on several occasions that he is the Son of God, he is divine, and he eventually ends up crucified for blasphemy.

But more so, it misses the point because the disciples don't believe Jesus to be divine simply because he said so, but because of what he did demonstrates who he really is.

His divinity is oozing out of his actions all the time. You see, Jesus is capable of things that nobody else is capable of. And you see that here, don't you?

Jesus' divinity is proved to you in two words at the beginning of verse 18. It's the words, at once. At once. Look at what's happening.

[15 : 01] Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee, seeking out his disciples, and he's doing it in the most unlikely of places where no sane rabbi would expect to find any followers at all. These are slim pickings for disciples right here.

And he sees Simon and Andrew in a boat, busily fishing, and he calls out to them, and at once they listen. They drop everything, get out of their boats, and follow him.

It's an immediate response. It's the same idea with James and John in verse 20, but a slightly different emphasis. The NIV translates it different, but it's the same two words in Greek. Without delay is literally at once again.

But here it's Jesus doing it at once. In other words, Jesus is not kind of building up to this. He's not going to pitch. In other words, he's just calling out. He calls to James and John.

Not only do they respond immediately, but here the emphasis is that they respond completely. They obey completely. They leave their father in the boat. They abandon the family business to take up with a total stranger.

[16 : 03] Again, it's so obvious, isn't it, that we miss how remarkable it is. I mean, imagine, just try it yourself. Try asking anybody to do anything and see whether they do it at once.

I guarantee you that no one will do anything you ask them to do at once. If you're a parent, you can't even get your child to put on their shoes to go out to somewhere where they want to at once.

And yet Jesus here calls out to complete strangers engaged in their daily business. And he says to them, not just what would you like to do?

He says, follow me. Abandon what it is that you're doing and come follow me. And these guys do it without hesitation immediately and completely.

We were thinking earlier that the story of the universe, according to the Bible, is of humanity hiding from God. Hiding not in moral neutrality, but hiding in moral shame.

[17 : 02] We know we're in the wrong. We feel it instinctively. Our consciences tell us that if we were to meet a holy God, we'd be absolutely undone. Yet, that holy God in the person of the Son calls out to ordinary God hiders.

And you might imagine that they would get in the boat and go, right, let's row. Guys, let's row. Let's go the other direction. God is calling out to us. He's here. Let's get away from him. But they don't.

They drop everything and come to him. Why? Well, because of who he is. Because Jesus is God in flesh. Come with a mission of grace and mercy to forgive and to save.

Now, think about what's going on here. Jesus is the eternally divine Son. He is the one, the scriptures tell us, that by whom and through whom all things are created. Jesus is the one who spoke the world into existence.

Let there be light and there was light. That's been Mark's introduction, hasn't it? Father, Spirit and Son, a new beginning, a new creation. And now we find that this creator God is speaking in the world again.

[18 : 11] His word, which made life in the first place, now makes new life. As he calls out to these fishermen, come, follow me. And of course, they follow him.

Transforming their everyday, run-of-the-mill, ordinary fishermen with no thought of following Jesus into disciples of the living God. Before we move on, just ponder this with me some more.

Down through the centuries, theologians have distinguished between what they call the general call of the gospel and the effective or effectual call of God.

The general call of the gospel covers this idea that we are to preach the good news of the Lord Jesus to everyone and anyone.

The message of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior who was sent to die on a cross to save us from sin, that message is to be preached to everyone everywhere.

[19 : 15] It's the general call, it's the job of the church to preach Christ to everyone and anyone. But the truth is that that general call on its own has no power over people who are preoccupied with themselves, lost in false religion or dazzled by the world's treasures.

It kind of bounces off, doesn't it? You see that all the time. If you were to stand on a street corner, and people in this room do this in London, they stand on street corners and they will preach the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And most of the time, for most people, that message just bounces off. They're not interested. It's the general call preached to everyone. What we really need is an effectual call of God into the hearts of people.

The God to speak internally to the hearts of individuals by the Spirit and to call them to him in a way that they simply cannot resist, with an effectual, an effective call that comes with Holy Spirit power to transform.

And that's what's going on here, isn't it? The Spirit is making the disciples alive to what Jesus is saying so that they might respond to him. Jesus is speaking and making followers at the same time.

[20 : 31] Jesus is not like me here shouting to you and saying to you, come, follow Christ. Jesus is speaking with Holy Spirit power into the hearts of his disciples saying, come, follow me.

And they cannot resist because of who Jesus is. Because he is God himself. Calling with an effectiveness, calling people to repent and believe, to jump out of their boats, leave their family businesses and follow him.

Of course, that begs the question this morning. I can't point to you and say, come, follow Jesus. I can do it in a general way, but God alone can do that for you this morning.

I get the great privilege this morning of preaching this general call, but God does the effective calling even at the same time as I am speaking the general call of the gospel.

That's how it works. I will speak to you and God by his spirit calls out to you. So let me ask you this morning if you've ever had one of these at once moments, if we might call it that.

[21 : 38] Yeah. You've maybe had a moment in your life where you have known for sure that you have to follow Jesus. That this is not a suggestion from the Lord.

This is not one of the options on the panel P of things that you might choose from to live for. No, this is Jesus speaking to you and saying, come, follow me. And you know you can't resist.

This is the experience of all of our church members. They have all had this at once moment. For some of them, it happened when they were small children.

For others, it happened in a church gathering like this when they just knew that God was speaking to them and saying, you must follow me. For one of our church members, it was in the Congolese jungle.

For another one of our leaders, it was while in a prison cell. What about for you this morning? Maybe you think, oh, you know what? Steve, that's all very well. I just thought I'm not that kind of person.

[22 : 38] You know, I know that some people kind of feel like that, but I don't ever have that. I'm not really that kind of religious person. I'm not really that interested. I'm busy with my work or my studies.

I've got my hands full of stuff to do in this world. I'm waiting. I'm just not that guy. I'm not that woman. You're speaking to somebody else, not me. Let me tell you that that's just the kind of person that Jesus calls in Mark 1.

Person who's busy and distracted, had no thought of following Jesus. Busy with their nets. Busy fishing in the family business. And Jesus says, come, follow me.

And they had no choice. People overlooked by most of the world. The final surprise in these verses then is this. That being called by Jesus changes what your life is for.

Stereotypes are a dangerous thing, aren't they? But I think I'm on fairly safe ground. When I imagine that Simon and Andrew and James and John, probably not the journaling type, right?

[23 : 37] I don't know whether they were. Maybe they did, you know, drew pretty pictures every evening about the fish that they caught and the waves and all that sort of stuff. But I doubt it. But if they were, they would look back at this day when they heard Jesus call and go, that day everything changed for me.

This is a new journal day, right? New app. Clean break. Scrap the old, in with the new. This is the day that everything changed. This was the best day of my life.

Everything changed after this day. Everything was different after this point. Just notice as we come towards the finish, look down at verse 17. Jesus calls them to follow him. Literally, it is to walk in his way, which hints at this idea that repenting and believing that we were looking at last week is not just a one-time event.

It's a transformation in how we live and how we act. And that's exactly what Jesus spells out. He says, come, follow me, verse 17, and I will send you out to fish for people.

The word send there is literally the word to make. The idea here is not that Jesus so much is sending these disciples out on mission, rather that it is those who hear his call, who come and follow him, who he himself is making, transforming into a new kind of people who themselves are passionate for mission.

[25 : 01] Does that make sense? It's not that he is sending them as they are. He is transforming them, not only into people who want to follow him, but people who are passionate about his mission. He is making them into fishes of man.

So they go from fishing for fish to being like Jesus and fishing for people. In other words, at repenting and believing, denying yourself, taking up your cross, becoming a Christian, believing in Jesus, responding to this effectual call, whatever the language we want to use is, that not only involves a radical turnaround in repentance and faith in Jesus for this sin of hiding ourselves in the dark, but also at the same time comes with a total transformation of purpose.

My life is for something different now. And that purpose is not self-generated, right? This is not, and churches can do this, right? They can preach the gospel like this. You know, they say, come to Jesus and follow him.

He will forgive your sin. But then you better well try hard to live for him. It's not that. Come to Jesus, follow him, and he will make you into a new person.

Transforms your life's purpose, making you into a fisher of people. So we find that we have come to be found by Jesus, and then we are sent out to find others for him.

[26 : 22] And we find, don't we, that we are now more interested in the idea that others might find Jesus than we are interested in catching fish in the sea, or making deals in the market, or lessons in school, or our reputations, our ambitions, our desires.

So much so that the disciples become the ongoing means of people hearing Christ calling out to others as they, like Jesus, seek others like them to follow Jesus.

And you need to be careful here, don't you? Jesus is not saying that fishing is wrong or that work is bad. He's not even saying it's a necessary evil. It's not saying this is something you must do, but God's not really interested in it.

Jesus is not hating on fishing here. He's not saying here everything that needs to be said about work and its place in our lives. Rather, his point is that following him, hearing his call, comes with a transforming desire of purpose.

I am more interested in seeking that lost people find Jesus than I am in whatever else it was that I was interested in before.

[27 : 29] When I went to university, like a long, long time ago, right? I went to university and the only thing I wanted, the only thing I wanted was a job where I got a Land Rover and a Gore-Tex jacket.

That was all I wanted, right? So I'd been working on a farm and doing some forestry, and all I wanted was to drive around on my own in the rain, maybe with a dog or something like that running around as well.

And I got to university. I was a Christian already. I just wasn't a very mature Christian. I got to university and found, to my surprise, that the best way and the most joyful thing in my life was seeing other people, hearing this call of Jesus and wanting to follow him.

I knocked on one of my friend's doors and said to him, are you interested in looking at the Bible? Because that's what our Christian union was telling us to do. I kind of like steeled myself to do this.

And he went, do you know what? I've been reading a Bible for months and no idea what it's about. He became a Christian. And his best mate became a Christian.

[28 : 32] And her friend became a Christian too. This is amazing, I thought. This is way better than a Land Rover and a Gore-Tex jacket. And that's what's going on here, isn't it?

The call of Jesus Christ comes with this transformation in purpose. All of a sudden, the thing that I long for in life, that you must long for in life if you follow Christ, is that other people might find, be found better by the Lord Jesus.

You see it here, don't you, with James and John in verses 19 and 20. They leave Zebedee's family business to join Jesus'. Their priority shifts. They join in the seek for God's people.

There's a uniqueness, obviously, isn't there, to these first disciples. They're being called by Jesus to be the founding 12 apostles of the church. But this fishing for people, this family business, gets passed on from generation to generation.

And that's our role here. And if you're a member of this church, this is our family business as well. This is the family business of the church to which you belong. This family business is not my job.

[29 : 34] It's not my job as the pastor to do this for you. This is all of our jobs together, to go fishing for people. It's a job that we're being called into, made into by the Spirit of God.

I have to say that one of the most encouraging things in this church merger is this. That here what you've got is a bunch of people from two different churches who have decided to set aside comfort, tradition, personal preference, and said, you know what?

What's most important to us is that people in Kilburn, in Queen's Park, hear about Jesus. That matters to us the most. And that is Mark 1 in action.

What's best for the gospel is always what is best for us. And so our passion here is to be a church that preaches Christ to the lost and disciples believers into thinking that the lost people hearing about Jesus is the best thing to spend our lives for.

Well, we need the Lord's help for that. Let's pray that he might make us into these fishes of men. Let me pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[30 : 42] Let's pray.

We're transforming our church step by step, bit by bit, into a place where people hear about Jesus and are called to follow him. Make us into fishes for people, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.