

There is something romantic about Mark's version of the call of the first disciples. There he is walking along the Sea of Galilee when he spots a pair of fishermen. He calls and they abandon everything to follow him. He spots another pair and the process is repeated. It is a very good story, but we must not assume it is history. In Luke's account Jesus knows Simon - something not suggested in Mark - because he heals Simon's mother-in-law before, rather than after the call. Moreover, the call is sealed, by this miraculous catch of fish, an event recounted in the last chapter of John's gospel, in a very different context. More significantly, in Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus does not begin to gather disciples until after John is imprisoned; in John's gospel it is the Baptizer himself who introduces Andrew to Jesus, whereupon Andrew runs and tells his brother "We have found the Messiah." If Mark is offering us history then Luke and John aren't, a conclusion most people are reluctant to draw. Most folks want it all to be history, but it can't be, and it isn't. Rather than choosing, or ignoring the differences, it seems to me the best course is to say we don't know how the disciples were chosen.

But history does tell us that Jesus had followers. They came to see in him not simply a person worth dying for, that came later, and only after serious hesitations, and even betrayals. Rather, and far more important, they came to see in him someone worth living for, someone worth living through, and that devotion continued for the rest of their lives, and because of that devotion they told the world what they had found, and because they told the world what they had found you and I are here to day in this beautiful space hearing this story about them. So this morning I want to talk about discipleship from the perspective of this story we just heard, and then consider what, if anything, this story has to say to us. Though there are several points to be made, I confine myself to just two.

First, those who followed Jesus began to live entirely differently than they had before. It isn't just that they left off what they had been doing for the sake of doing something different. Not all of them did that; Mary and Martha of Bethany, to name two, stayed at home. (I know they are not included among the disciples, but don't accept the exclusion. Twelve disciples - one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel - is a literary and theological device of a patriarchal world view; we are not obligated to adhere to it. If Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene were not real and true disciples then the term has no meaning and should be discarded.) To return to the point, it is more that they began to live from a different perspective. In following Jesus the disciples stopped living for their own sakes and to started living for his sake. It is important to notice that the disciples were not good at this, at least not at first. But in the end at least some of them were so transformed that they did something that could only be interpreted as a miracle.

In the wake of his death they rejected the prevailing interpretation of Jesus and advanced their own. Where the state said Jesus was a seditious and hateful criminal, worthy of death by crucifixion, they declared he was the manifestation of a complete and perfect love. Where some of the leaders of their own religion declared Jesus was a blasphemer, they declared he was the revealer of the very God they all most deeply wanted to worship. That is devotion. To reject everything the world says about you and your leader, and to stand in the face of the most violent opposition to your understanding requires a rare, and again I dare say, miraculous, devotion.

But that, the gospels say, is what discipleship is all about. It is about the willingness to stand up against a world that says God is violent, and the peace of God is imposed by the

sword, and say that God is love, and as love will die a thousand times rather than kill even once. And it is about the willingness to insist that we know this because of Jesus, because of what he did and what happened to him. In a world that really, truly, deeply believes that the only path to real safety is to become bigger, stronger, more powerful, more able to impose our will upon others than they are to impose their will upon us, the disciples were so transformed by Jesus that in the end they were able to reject that perspective and to proclaim reconciliation, not revenge, is the pathway to peace, and that compassion, not conquest, is our one great hope.

Such a view does not require that we leave home and become homeless itinerants. It does require that we begin to live for something much larger than our safety, our own image, our own power. It requires that we begin to live out of that unconditional regard for all people God showed us in Jesus, a regard that was heedless of who deserved it and who didn't, a regard that simply refused to calculate who was acceptable and who wasn't. To become a disciple in the way those who followed Jesus were disciples, is to reject the world's insistence that there are categories of people who just don't count, who aren't good enough, and to declare that in the economy of God, as it is revealed in Jesus, the categories of righteous and unrighteous get all jumbled and lose their power to define us. The tax collector, the occupying soldier, the thief executed next to you, no less than the hard working laborer, or the wealthy Pharisee, all come within the scope of the acceptable. If you don't believe that is controversial, go home and look in the mirror, and ask yourself just how deeply you not only believe that, but live it out. That is a test I can't pass on my best days. Then read a newspaper to see how common that view is. But that is what discipleship finally did to the disciples.

This illustrates the second point. Because discipleship transforms people by leading them to lead a life of openness to all people, an openness grounded in God and God's love, rather than one grounded in the imperatives of a world that believes in separating people into convenient, if at times cumbersomely assembled categories, discipleship makes a person very unreliable. We see this illustrated in the remarkable metaphor our story presents us. Peter and Andrew, James and John simply up and left their boats, their families, their responsibilities to their community, in order to follow Jesus. We find something admirable in James and John, but what about old man Zebedee? Ten minutes before Jesus shows up he has two reliable assistants and he can look forward to being cared for in his rapidly approaching old age. Suddenly he has no help at all, and might find it impossible to sustain his livelihood without more help, which now he will have to pay for. What looks like devotion to us might look like irresponsibility to someone else.

And this is just the point. To be a disciple means you cannot always be counted on to sustain a status quo that needs your assent, even if that assent is simply to remain silent. To be a disciple means refusing to agree to become like those you oppose, even when your allies demand it, when to do so requires dehumanizing those who would dehumanize us. We celebrated the birth of Martin Luther King Jr. last Monday, so he will be my example now. In commenting on Eugene Bull Conner's violence against demonstrators, using not just fire hoses but dogs as well, King declared that no matter what Conner did, no matter how violent he or anyone else became in the effort to destroy the Civil Rights movement, none of it would matter. In response to it all he declared "We will not stop loving you." This perspective was mystifying to Malcom X and the Black Panthers, who found in King a most unreliable, even

feckless advocate for racial equality. It was of course ridiculous to Conner himself. But King didn't care about being reliable, he cared about being a true disciple, which, for all his flaws, he truly was. For it is discipleship and discipleship alone that transforms a human soul so completely that a person can love those everyone on your side believes should be hated. It is true discipleship that makes a person unreliable in that way.

Yet, that is the call, and like the disciples I spend most of my time answering it imperfectly, or even not at all. But it is God's call none the less, and in that call, through that call, we will in the end find our true selves and the one true God who loves us all.