

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Gospel Year B

Jesus Calls and Connects Us

Mark 1:14-20

Third Sunday of Epiphany

Analysis by Matthew DeLoera

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Author's Note: In case you are interested in exploring more thoroughly some of the statistics that I reference in my piece, here are the articles:

* [LINK 1](#)

* [LINK 2](#)

* [LINK 3](#)



DIAGNOSIS: Isolated

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Hunkering Down

Grounding: Jesus encounters fishermen Simon and Andrew hard at work, casting their net into the sea. This is hard and repetitive work, requiring skill to throw the net so it opens properly upon hitting the water; it also requires strong backs to draw in the full net. Continuing along the shore, Jesus then spies James and John hunkered down in their boat, mending their nets. Nets are large and bulky, and normally need to be spread out on shore for mending. So, this must be a dire emergency, where spending time returning to shore would critically impact the day's quota. So, they hunker down in the boat to do what needs to be done.

Tracking: As the year of our Lord, 2020, has drawn to a close, we witness the spread of Covid-19 accelerating. Daily death tolls are high, and availability of intensive care units remains a critical concern. It's true that data reporting is not comprehensive, and sometimes under-reported for a variety of reasons (negligence? incompetence? bureaucracy?). At the same time, we are bombarded with an epidemic of misleading

information. Unable to know exactly how dire our emergency is, we do what needs to be done, and continue to hunker down at home and isolate ourselves for everyone's safety.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Brought Down

Grounding: Surely James and John must be frustrated, and perhaps they even rue their negligence before setting out, but their need to produce weighs on their shoulders. The fate of their family business rides on this, and a day's yield is uncertain even on the best of days. Also, they are responsible to pay a daily wage to their hired men, but have no paycheck protection program to bail them out. The weight of such an obligation can really diminish any sense of hope and turn the tide toward desperation.

Tracking: Kaiser Family Foundation and other organizations have released reports summarizing the implications of Covid-19 for mental health and substance use. The social isolation and loneliness of our hunkering down correlates with increased depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and even suicide rates. But we're afraid to go out because we can't trust anyone else to be responsible. The weight of all this concern rests on our shoulders and brings down our own sense of hope. Can we tread water long enough for a vaccine or change in our legislature to make a difference? And, if we can, how reliable are either of these?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Put Down

Grounding: It is striking that these sets of brothers jump ship and leave simply because this stranger, Jesus, appears out of nowhere and calls them. Somehow, the strange irresistibility of Jesus' call to follow and be made to fish for people, surpasses the uncertainty of what lies ahead. Or perhaps any opportunity to jump ship would be better than another moment of living with

such grinding obligation. Either way, Jesus' call also places them in a double bind—whether they stay to support the folks that need them where they already are, or leave to attend to the needs of untold strangers, someone will be neglected.

Tracking: By hunkering down and isolating, we discover ourselves likewise caught in a double bind. Some of us isolate out of a sense of responsibility to our neighbors, not wanting to risk their health. Yet, in doing so, we neglect their need for human connection. And, if we are essential workers, we are forced to choose between assuming risk or joining the rising ranks of the unemployed who can't seem to find jobs. Either way, we neglect others. So, we cling to the thought that we have made the best choice, given our circumstances. But the persistent nagging of our consciences reminds us that even this is self-justification, noted by the only One qualified to justify us. In the end, we are isolated even from God.

PROGNOSIS: Called and Connected



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Raised Up

Grounding: Jesus knows too well our double-bind, because he takes the same burden upon himself. How many folks could Jesus have fed or healed or even resurrected if he hadn't gone to the cross? Nevertheless, he goes to the cross, to suffer the uttermost isolation of death for our sake. Yet, he was raised, in defiance of everything that makes sense, so that we would no longer be isolated from him or from God. Hence, he declares that the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.

Crossing: Because Jesus binds his resurrection to our own bodies, his forgiveness is assured and will not be revoked. We no longer need to justify ourselves, because he has justified and raised us with him. Granted, we remain human, and sin shows itself in even our most loving choices through unpredictable consequences. Yet, this double-bind is surpassed by Jesus' declaration about us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Repented

Grounding: Jesus calls us through his own Spirit, enabling us to repent and believe in his good news.

Crossing: By Jesus' unconditional forgiveness, he unburdens our consciences from the guilt that accused us of obsessing over our own safety at the expense of neglecting others. It is true that we can't fully shake our fear of catching this virus, or our instinctual judging of others for not being as responsible as us. Yet, we are surprised to find that this need is surpassed by the joy of beholding the kingdom of God breaking in through all this tumult. Somehow, this really is enough to move us through these days with a peace that passes all understanding. We know that this virus will not have the last word about any of us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Reaching Out

Grounding: By his universal proclamation, Jesus reaches out through all space and time to call forth his followers in every age and pandemic.

Crossing: We have an epidemic of neighbors who suffer in mind, body, or spirit. None of us are untouched. Yet, vaccines are going into arms. Strangers are pitching in and helping strangers with food and financial assistance because these are tough times. We follow Jesus wherever he might lead us, even in our flawed choices, to reach out to folks who feel isolated and reassure them that they are not alone. Whether we reach out physically or virtually, we trust that either way, others will assuredly meet Jesus through us and receive the same gracious and life-giving call that changes everything.