

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Gospel, Year B

NOW IS THE TIME

Mark 1:14-20

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

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

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

DIAGNOSIS: Time Is Running Out

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Disrupting the Status Quo

Simon, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee were just minding their own fishing business. Immersed in their work and with business as usual, they did not want to be bothered by the turmoil around them. However, their world would not remain tidy and settled. Something dramatic was about to disrupt their lives. John had announced that the One for whom Israel had been waiting was finally coming. The status quo would no longer hold. Everyone needed to prepare with repentance and baptism. Herod and the

empire would not tolerate such a disruption of their world and their privileges; they would arrest him. Despite this, the coming change could not be thwarted.

Jesus suddenly appears declaring that the time is fulfilled. The Kingdom has indeed arrived . . . with him! Now there would be no going back. Life will never again be the same. The disciples were about to discover what this meant for them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Pretending and Ignoring

Despite John's disruptive ministry and the controversy created by his arrest, the disciples give no indication that they are aware or care. Maybe they don't want to know or be inconvenienced. Now is not the time! Likewise, as Jesus publicly begins to make bold and outrageous claims for himself, they blissfully carry on their work, "sticking their heads in the sand," ignoring the demands of John and the claims of Jesus while pretending that none of this mattered. Underlying their pretending and ignoring was a fear that they would not be ready and would not measure up to the changes demanded by the arrival of Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Reality Bites

Assuming that the disciples were aware of the warnings of John and had heard the claims about Jesus, they must have been stunned when he showed up on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. John's fiery preaching had warned them of this day. What they feared had now arrived. Jesus' dramatic announcement had not budged them. If they thought they could flee the wrath to come, they were kidding themselves. Now it is too late.

They are like all of us who pretend and ignore the fact that the End is coming, that our days are numbered and that there will be a final reckoning with the Eternal Bean Counter. For those who

have been ignoring this reality, when the time is fulfilled and God arrives, we will discover what bad news this is for fishermen like us who thought we could hide in the status quo. There is no hiding even in obscure places like the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is reality . . . and reality bites!

PROGNOSIS: The Time Has Arrived

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Follow Me

We, like the disciples, are surprised when Jesus shows up and does not read us the riot act. We thought we needed to escape and hide. Jesus finds us anyway and just when we thought we would be nailed, Jesus chooses us and says something we never thought would fall from his lips: "Follow me."

Unlike any other rabbi, teacher, or leader with whom we are familiar, Jesus chooses followers who are utterly unqualified. There were no tests to be taken, tryouts to pass, or resumés to be submitted. Jesus just chooses us, no strings attached. We never thought that the arrival of the kingdom would be like this. Jesus defies our expectations, the disciples' expectations . . . and God's! If anyone is going to get nailed for this, it will be Jesus. And he did, on the cross, where he paid for his defiance of Herod, the Empire and even God who expected sinners to repent and shape up before they could ever step foot into the kingdom.

Surprisingly God will not let such obstacles stand in the way of God's love. Therefore, Jesus tells the fisherman, "Follow me" instead of "Get away from me." It may have seemed reckless and foolish at the time ("This is no way to run a church!"), but in the end the reality that bites could not keep Jesus down . . . in the ground . . . nor God's love . . . outside the tomb.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): They Followed

Stunned, overwhelmed, and captivated by Jesus' choice of them,

they no longer pretend, ignore, or avoid this moment. This was the decisive time of their lives. This was no time to procrastinate. (Notice that this text begins with “now” and twice “immediately” describing the response of the disciples, first Simon and Andrew and then, the sons of Zebedee.) They must respond now. They do, not with fear and flight, but with faith and trust. They actually believe that Jesus’ call is good news. They freely follow him confident of a future that was in the hands of the one they believed they could count on no matter what.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Fishing for People
In the old world, the world before the fullness of time and the arrival of the kingdom, life was business as usual at the Sea of Galilee. It was about covering your bases, preserving your safety, and keeping your privileged place in the status quo. Other people were important only in so far as they make your life better . . . because obviously your life needed to be better. Everyone is for hire and needs a paycheck.

However, NOW IS THE TIME for change because your life is better. God has graced your life with Jesus who has come to call you! Therefore, Simon and Andrew leave their nets. James and John leave their father, Zebedee, behind in the boat with the hired men. They now get to follow Jesus by “fishing for people” not to keep their business going to ensure their own security but to help other people experience the same incredible good news that decisively changed their lives on that day at the Sea of Galilee. Free from the demands of preserving the status quo and their own necks, they live in a new reality where they freely give themselves away in love to their neighbors so they too might believe that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.” That means a new outlook on life (“repent . . .”) and a willingness to follow Jesus into a new world (“believe the good news”) where everyone is loved, all are

valued, and everyone awaits Jesus' call to "follow" him.