

Yes, to the Way of Jesus/ Follow Jesus
Dr. Patricia L. Hunter
Seattle First Baptist Church
January 21, 2018

Mark 1:14-20 NRSV

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

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. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed Jesus (him).

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. I am going to tag this text, Yes to the Way of Jesus. Or, if you would like something simpler then use, Follow Jesus.

According to the gospel of Mark, Jesus began his ministry as John the Baptist’s ministry was ending. John was in prison, for the offense of telling the truth. He told people they could do better and that God expects better. But growing up, I remember Dr. Samuel B. McKinney, pastor emeritus of Mount Zion Baptist Church saying, the next worse thing to a lie is the truth told at the wrong time. Sometimes times telling the truth will get us in trouble.

John admonished those living in high places and those in low places to honor God and to live moral and ethical lives. We know that when people in high places of power don't care for the truth or are incapable of telling the truth, they will find ways to dismiss, name call, or silence those who dare to speak. Such was the case for John the Baptist, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Archbishop Oscar Romero, MLK, Malala Yousafzai, and the tens of thousands of Christians persecuted around the globe today. But in God's perfect timing, the proclamation of the good news continues. The time is fulfilled, reads the gospel. And, the kingdom of God or the reign of God has come near. In other words, now is the time, to move out and act—here, now, today!

Jesus walked about the Sea of Galilee and saw some men busy casting their nets and working. He called out to Simon and his brother Andrew and said, follow me and I will make you fish for people. And the book says they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. Then Jesus went a bit farther and found a couple of other busy brothers, James and John. They were working with their father repairing their fishing nets. And Jesus said follow me. Immediately, they stopped what they were doing, and followed Jesus. There obviously was an urgency to Jesus' request that the men dropped what they were doing and followed him.

We are living in a time of urgency where the planet is at risk of being blown to smithereens while world leaders debate over whose nuclear button is bigger. The rain forest is at risk of being totally destroyed. The oceans are at risk and rising. Children are at risk from abusive parents and coaches as we have heard over and over again on the news this past week. Poor children are at risk of having to go

without healthcare. While children's healthcare is being used as a bargaining chip to get the government up and running again. Dreamers are at risk of being deported. Affordable housing in Seattle is at risk, unless you are willing to live in a tiny micro house. Women's reproductive rights are at risk. College education with its soaring costs will soon be a privilege only of the wealthy. And, in the midst of the planet's groaning and the aching pain of God's people an urgent cry comes to us to follow Jesus. Today we hear the call to follow the way of Jesus.

So, what is the way of Jesus you ask?

- The way of Jesus is speaking truth to power,
- Showing kindness to those living in the margins,
- It is finding your justice issue and working it,
- It is showing tough love. It is shaking the dust from your feet when you have to.
- It is showing hospitality and saying an encouraging word,
- Lending a hand without expecting something in return,
- Worshipping God when life is good and when life is challenging.
- The way of Jesus is knowing God can do anything but fail and so we press on!

When we're invited to follow Jesus, or follow the way of Jesus, our answer is not as immediate as those first disciples. We want to do the work of Kingdom building, but we're busy. There is a lot on our plates. We have our professional and volunteer work to do. And, then there is the bridge club, the garden club, yoga, Crossfit, the grandkids, and Women's Ministry and choir—all very important

work. But I'm not sure God is very impressed with our excuses. God is looking for a yes. Yes, I'll follow you Jesus.

Those first disciples were busy when Jesus approached them. They were engaged in their life's work and focused on other things when Jesus called to them. I remember an old college choir teacher told me, if you want something done well, ask someone who is busy to do it. Now that doesn't always work out but a lot of times it is true. God is calling you and me for a reason--because of the gifts, and skills, and resources we have. Not because we have nothing else to do.

The gospel writer said that James and John left their father Zebedee in the care of the hired hands. We don't know how Pop's felt about that. But, the text lets us know that James and John had assets. They had enough financial resources that they hired others to help them make more money and take care of the family. So, telling the Spirit no we can't follow Jesus today because we have family to care for, a home to manage, or assets to protect is still no excuse. The right answer when the Spirit tugs at our heart to follow the way of Jesus is, yes.

Sometimes we are reluctant to follow Jesus because we already have a plan for our lives. We've visualized it. We've mapped it out using the latest apps, and moving in another direction to follow Jesus might be too disruptive we say. Well, here is a news flash: following Jesus is always disruptive. That is the nature of the call.

I guarantee you it will be a bumpy ride. You will have to stand up when you would rather sit; speak up when you prefer to be silent; give money you had earmarked for a new pair of shoes, show up when you would rather be home napping. But Jesus, said, in as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me. When the call comes to follow the way of Jesus, the answer is, yes.

Blogger Susie Moore says we often say no to opportunities out of fear. Remember when we were kids and we were told, can't is not a word? It made us think, or it made me think because I knew can't is a word—in fact it was a contraction. Then we had to at least try those things we said we couldn't do—like ride a bike or learn multiplication tables, or run a mile. Frequently when we tried those things we said we couldn't do, we actually succeeded.

When God calls us to do the work of being our sisters keeper and our brother's keeper, we *can* do it. We may not have all the answers of how the work of justice making gets done, but if you bring your five loaves of bread and two fish, and I bring my two loaves and eight fish, a multitude of 5,000 will be fed.

Jesus may not be calling you to leave your professional career like those first disciples, but calling you nonetheless—to be a witness of love, compassion, and justice *on* your job. You don't have to go to seminary to follow the way of Jesus. Just show up and speak a word of encouragement. You don't have to sell your home and move to a mission field, every neighborhood in this country is a mission opportunity.

I am frequently asked, aren't you discouraged and distraught at the direction and leadership of this country. No! My foreparents endured the middle passage, slavery, Jim Crow, being the last hired and the first fired. No, I am not discouraged that Congress and the President are dysfunctional, because I know that God is still in control. I continue to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. I was part of a crowd of witnesses 30, 40, 50,000 strong yesterday. God is still in charge. I am not discouraged because I come to SFBC and see God at work all around this place.

I am not discouraged because God continues to call us every day to follow the way of Jesus. The call goes out asking who will carry light to those who face gloom day in and day out? The call goes out asking, who will speak words of hope, and love, and peace, and justice to those who get discouraged? The Spirit ask, who will encourage others to follow the way of Jesus that leads to peace and eternal life. And we answer, here I am Lord. It is I Lord. I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart. When you hear the call to follow the way of Jesus, the answer is, yes I'll go.

Our closing song is found in your bulletin, Here I Am Lord. Please stand as you are able and sing this song as your commitment, your Yes, to follow the way of Jesus.