

The 3rd Sunday after Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: January 21, 2018

Mark 1:14-20: *When God Calls Just Do It!*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alexander Graham Bell was an amazingly talented person. He invented the multiple telegraph, the audiometer, which is used to test our hearing, the tricycle landing gear you find on airplanes, and a host of other less well known machines. In addition to this, he was the co-founder of the prestigious magazine *Science*, served as President of the National Geographic Society, and spent his life working with deaf people. But the most famous of all his creations was, of course, the telephone. It also made his family and his descendants enormously wealthy. But, did you know that Bell almost lost it all? You see, Bell never seemed to get around to submitting a patent application. Finally, his father-in-law, who had financed a lot of the research, got so impatient that he filed the patent on Bell's behalf on the 14th of February 1876, Bell's 29th birthday.

And it was a good thing he did, because just a few hours later, another scientist by the name of Elisha Gray went to the patent office to get a patent on a machine he'd been working on for many years you guessed it, the telephone. Wouldn't you agree that some things are so important that you need to act on them NOW? That is true in all of life: In the things that really matter, there is a need to act with urgency.

My sisters and brothers, consider our reading for today from Mark's Gospel.

Mark tells us that Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, when 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." Mark says, "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him."

Notice that it doesn't say they pondered his invitation. "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him." "When he had gone a little farther, he saw

James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.

"Immediately," says Mark, "he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him." How did these men respond to Jesus' call? "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him."

It always has amazed me that the first four disciples of Jesus' responded to his call without any seeming hesitation. He was asking them to leave their

livelihood, leave their families, leave the community they grew up in for an adventure the result of which they could not see and immediately they heeded his call and followed him. That says a lot about how Jesus came across to people, but it also says much about them. And perhaps it says even more about the task Jesus had called them to.

Mark shows us a Jesus who is in a hurry; a man with a sense of urgency.

Mark uses one word in his Gospel more than any other. It is the word “immediately.” This word is used forty times in those brief 16 chapters of Mark’s Gospel. The last thing Jesus wants is procrastinators. That’s clear in Mark’s Gospel. This is the way life is. The really important things require us to respond immediately.

Consider, for example, how urgent it is that we demonstrate our affection for those we love. Years ago when the original “Dear Abby” was asked what letter was requested the most for reprinting, she put into her syndicated column this one: “Dear Abby: I am the most heartbroken person on the earth. I always found time to go everywhere else but to see my old gray-haired parents. They sat at home, loving me just the same. Now when I go to visit their graves I wonder if God will ever forgive me for the heartaches I must have caused them.”

There is a great urgency about love, is there not? Children grow up oh so quickly. I look at my grandson. He is 31/2 now, I remember the day he was born as if it was yesterday. The same is true of my sons now in their early 30s and a daughter in her late 20s. I think about my dear father, there are some people whose love we treasure today who might not be with us tomorrow or next week or next year. If we are going to take time to show our love for one another, we had better do it now. There is urgency about the really important things in life. One of those important things is demonstrating our affection for people we love.

I read a story about a very bashful young man who was hesitant about demonstrating his affection for his sweetheart. “Oh, but that I were an octopus,” he said one night, “that I might wrap all eight arms around you.” His impatient sweetheart replied, “Don’t worry about having eight arms. Just make better use of the two arms you already have.” Sometimes there is urgency about demonstrating love.

My sisters and brothers, there can sometimes be an even greater urgency about altering your lifestyle. There comes a time when a person must change his or her way of living and do it now, such as putting down that drink or taking that trip to the casino with a pocketful of ‘scared money’ or dabbling

in dangerous and highly addictive drugs or something as simple as cheating on your taxes and lying.

Newspaper headlines have brought us tragic stories of the inroads that drug abuse has made into our society. Ball players, movie stars, children of famous political families, as well as, ordinary citizens by the thousands are having their lives destroyed by this modern plague. Last week I attended an opioid crisis meeting with the clergy of the diocese and representatives of the Rhode Island Department of health. Interestingly, there has been a shift from the cities where illicit drug use was concentrated to rural communities of this country which seem to be under attack. How low does a person have to sink? How much money do we have to spend? How many people do he have to hurt before we say, “STOP? This is it. I’ve got to get control of my life?” There comes a time when fighting a destructive habit or a debilitating weakness you must say, “I must stop now or it will be too late.”

There is a story of a man who waited until it was too late. His name was Judas. I wonder if Judas ever intended for Christ to die. I wonder if he ever thought it would go that far. Perhaps, Jesus had said something that hurt or offended Judas. That happens sometimes in a church, doesn’t it? Maybe Judas felt rejected by the other disciples. Perhaps it troubled him that he was

not part of that small inner circle of disciples closest to Jesus, Peter, James and John, who were always there on significant occasions in Jesus' life. Could it have been simple jealousy? "I'll show them," Judas may have said to himself. But it may be that he never intended for Jesus to be crucified. "I have betrayed innocent blood," he cried out to the Sanhedrin on that Holy Thursday night when he tried to return their money. "What is that to us?" they said with a sneer as they turned their backs on him. Suddenly Judas realized that it was too late, and he went and hanged himself.

It is an awful thing to wake up and realize it is too late, too late to save your marriage, too late, you're hooked, you're addicted, too late, you have a monkey on your back that you can't get off. You are too late. You have been caught. You have been found out. You have brought disgrace to your family and friends. It's all too late. You've had that 'one for the road' and now there is a tragic accident and someone is dead in a car crash and guess what? It is ALL YOUR FAULT because you were drunk behind the wheel. It is too late. My sisters and brothers believe me when I tell you that I am not some kind of Polly Anna. But, do you see that there is sometimes urgency about changing the way you are living? Listen to that small inner voice deep down inside saying, "Stop, for God's sake, stop!" Listen to your inner voice. It just may be saying STOP to you this morning, before it is too late. Many people put off

making necessary changes to their life until tomorrow. And, of course, tomorrow never comes.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, important things should never be put off. Life has a way of getting away from us. So often, tomorrow never comes. If you love someone, tell them. Don't hesitate. If you're facing an important task, no matter how distasteful, tackle it. You're not going to enjoy doing it anymore when you can no longer put it off. Of course, procrastination with heeding the call of God is the most serious procrastination of all. I challenge you to find one place in the New Testament where Jesus told anybody to "go home, mull it over, and get back to me tomorrow." It simply doesn't happen. Jesus comes to Simon and Andrew and James and John at their fishing boats beside the Sea of Galilee and says to them, "Follow me," and immediately they left their nets and followed him. Jesus' invitation is always an invitation to do it now! That is so true with the call to follow him. Correcting a destructive lifestyle is another one of those things when you say "I love you to yourself." But the most important is saying "Yes" to God. Here is the challenge of a lifetime. All you have to do is take that step today and just do it. Amen.