

## **Barre Congregational Church**

January 21, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Third Sunday of the Epiphany** ~

*"The Gift of Discipleship."*

Our services can be found on our website at [www.barrechurch.com](http://www.barrechurch.com)

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### **Scripture Reading: Mark 1 v 14 - 20**

#### **I. Introduction:**

The new year brings with it new beginnings, new hopes, and dreams for many of us, and also new commitments and responsibilities. As our children grow older, they may have different needs and desires, which require different resources from their parents and caregivers to ensure they have what they need to fulfil their dreams. We as adults too have different needs as our responsibilities grow and change, and we must occasionally review how we are doing, and whether we are in the right place in our lives. It is a good feeling to know one's life has purpose and what we do is meaningful inside the home, at work, in the community, and at church. I want to acknowledge that there are many adults and children in this world who are not getting their basic needs met, who are suffering from poverty, and therefore hunger, lack of housing, health issues without adequate healthcare, mental health problems, and more. Then there are thousands of people dying of the wars raging in the Middle East, Ukraine and other areas. These problems prevent people from experiencing the joy we are all meant to experience in this world. It just feels good to know we have what we need to enjoy life, and to be at peace.

#### **II. The disciples' ordinary lives before their Christ encounter:**

Perhaps this was what the fishermen in our passage was experiencing, a simple, yet fulfilled life in Galilee, and enjoying their daily work, catching real good fish in the Sea of Galilee, where, it was told, the fish was plenty, and they could spread their nets and have a good catch for the day, go home and be with their families. Life was simple for these hard-working people, but they knew what they had, and were probably quite happy doing what they were doing, together as friends and neighbors. Or so they thought...until they had an

encounter with the One who would change their lives forever, Jesus, the Christ who was traveling up the Jordan River after being baptized by John the Baptist, and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit as it came upon Him like a dove, and was now entering Galilee, the area He knew so well. He traveled through different villages until He saw these men as they were busy catching fish. Something prompted Him to stop and call them to follow Him, first Simon and his brother, Andrew, followed by James and John, brothers and sons of Zebedee. We don't know why them, but we know that He was driven by the Spirit of God to be on a mission to find specific individuals who would become His followers, a group whom He could entrust with the message He came to share. His message would bring the Kingdom of God near to them. He, the Son of God, would usher in a new era of salvation and hope and forgiveness of sins, completely different from a period of punishment for sins committed. His coming and message would be strange, and yet refreshing, it would be complex, but also simple, because He was a simple and loving human being, even though His stories sometimes needed unpacking for them to understand. Two worlds would collide when He started to talk to them, and they would respond eagerly to His call to follow Him.

### **III. The Call to Discipleship:**

Jesus' call for these men to follow Him was a call to discipleship, implying they would break all bonds with their current circumstances, family, and work lives, and would follow another. Discipleship was a common phenomenon where those who wanted to learn from a Master Rabbi, would seek that Rabbi out and learn from them. In this case Jesus, the Rabbi, was approaching the students and called them to follow Him and learn from Him. They were called to be made fishers of human beings, instead of catching fish.

In the Old Testament, God is the Great Fisher of humanity, not in a saving and rescuing manner, but in an ominous way, according to William Lane in his Commentary of Mark, as he refers to certain Old Testament texts where God is the judge, sending many fishermen to destroy the enemy, hunting them down because of their atrocities, as we see in Jeremiah 16 v 16. And in Ezekiel 29 v 4 ff, God, acting as the Great Fisher, speaks to Ezekiel about what will happen to Pharaoh, using images of fish sticking to the body of Pharaoh, and how God will

put hooks into him and throw him into the open field in the desert, left to be eaten by beasts of the earth and birds of the air. Here in Mark, Jesus becomes the Savior of the world. He transforms the Old Testament image of Divine Judgment into restoring people from their sins and destruction. As people we are inherently estranged from God, until the Spirit of God moves to call us by our names toward God. Jesus becomes the Fisher of humanity, bringing a new dispensation into this world. He came to save, to rescue, to heal, and to reconcile people with God.

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

To be a disciple of Christ therefore means to be called by Christ, and then to leave life the way it has been up till this point and follow Him. This means to learn from Him, the Master Rabbi, to repent and confess our sins, and to spread the good news of God. Our lives can become very comfortable the way they are, until God enters it and shakes it up a little. God's interest in this world is to save it, to heal it and prepare it for the future day of Judgment. God is interested in the improvement of the lives of everyone on this earth. God is interested in the church being an instrument of that change. May we all look at this call to follow Christ as a refreshing call for our lives, and ask God to show us the way, maybe a new way with new purpose, and resources to fulfil that purpose. May God help us all to say yes to the One who teaches us all about the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.