

Mark 1:14-20

January 21, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, that's today's weather report and now onto local news and specifically, we have an exciting infomercial about a job opportunity to tell our listening audience about.

"Are you looking for something new? Something life-changing? Something transformative? Well, if you said yes then you are in luck. Today's the day to get up out of your chair and onto a journey that is like no other. Be ready for a life on the move in which you very well might find yourself in the wilderness encountering evil forces of the world. Or arrested for proclaiming the Son of God has come near. If that isn't exciting enough for you, there's more. This vocation at times demands you leave everything behind; even, your family and friends. What's that? You don't think you're qualified? No problem. On the job training is provided as your teacher will be with you even when you think you're in the boat

all by yourself surrounded by stormy seas. This teacher will lead you to a vast world of opportunities in which people won't believe a word you are saying. Still not interested, you say? Wait – there's more. You are certain to encounter those quite different than you such as a man with leprosy who no one else wants to touch; except, for your teacher. Or how about that woman who has been bleeding for years and no one listens to? That's right – your teacher will lead you to her too. Or maybe it's to a prison to worship with convicted felons or to a shelter of homeless people – people just like you and me. But, wait – there's more. You might work alongside someone such as a tax collector or even a poor, ordinary fisherman whom sits at the bottom of the societal totem pole. Oh yeah, I almost forgot to mention your teacher will have many conspire against him and want to kill him because his teaching will threaten the powers of his day. You will be taken to the other side of lake. Cross boundaries into the unknown. Encounter Gentiles. Foreigners. People of a different religion. But, remember you won't be alone. The Holy Spirit will give you words to say. You probably will be rejected in your hometown. Even by your family and friends. Your teacher will send you out with little to nothing on your back to proclaim good news to all who will hear. You will encounter crowds of hungry people and commanded to feed them. Often when it seems you have very little to feed them with. Things will seem impossible.

Even with your on-the-job training you might decide to not follow. Even deny knowing your leader. But, relax! He won't give up on you. You have job security and he will just send you out again. Ready to sign on the dotted line. Great! But let's not forget about the call to seek not your own interests but those of your neighbor. Or how about the invitation that in order to be first you must become last. Or how about selling all your possessions and giving them to the poor. Or forgive those who hold grudges about you, or be handed over to local authorities and stand trial for accepting this call. And finally, you have the opportunity to watch your leader go to the cross, where he will be hung alongside two criminals, beaten and ultimately die."

Wait just a minute. I have to interrupt this infomercial folks. That's the last straw. I can't take the absurdness any longer. My producer insists I tell you the views, expressions, and contents of this infomercial do not reflect those of this radio station. Quite honestly, I don't know who in their right mind concocted this crazy job opportunity. Clearly, they didn't work with our advertising market to craft the wording a bit to put a smokescreen over all these "wonderful" selling points. You can't see me folks, but I say that tongue and cheek and with a wink of my eye. I am certain we could have sugar-coated this a bit. But, nonetheless, they have

paid their money and I am obligated to let this infomercial run its course. Oh, I hope it gets better.

“Yes, you heard that right. He will die. But, wait. He will come back to life.”

OK, now I do have to stop this. We can't be making false claims on this radio station. No way, no how – not on my watch. I am pulling the plug. But boss, I have to. This is just nonsense. OK, if you say so. Here we go folks, I guess I have no choice.

“Yes, you heard me right. Sounds too good to be true. But it is. And you might be one of the lucky ones to discover the empty tomb. Afraid at the sight.

Encountered by an angel. Sent to tell others who might doubt this happened.

Perhaps, even doubting it yourself. But, don't worry. You still have a job to do.

Your teacher will always remain with you and he will continue to equip and send

you and work through you. Now are you ready? Well, then let's talk about

compensation. Well, how does unending forgiveness of sins sound to you? Or,

how about the promise of eternal life? Yes, I said that correctly. Eternal life.

Meaning without end. You, too, will be raised from the dead. You say, you don't

think you can live up to your end of the bargain and earn this compensation. No problem. It's a gift. We call it grace."

Ok, I am officially done for the day. Heading home. I have heard it all now folks.

There are so many unknowns with our passage this morning. Like, how did these first disciples just drop everything they knew and follow Jesus? Did they encounter him before? Had they witnessed some of these miracles he was performing? Were their living conditions so bad that anything looked better than the current situation they were in? Inquiring minds want to know.

Well, we don't know a lot about these average, ordinary fishermen. We don't know whether they had prior interactions with Jesus or not. We don't know if they knew they knew what they were getting into? All of those things and more presented in our mock infomercial, which draws specifically on what we find throughout the whole of Mark's gospel. We don't know what James' and John's father Zebedee said when they walked away. We don't know if they even said "good-bye" to him and friends or ever returned home. We do know things probably weren't that bad. After all; their father, we are told, had a boat and

hired hands so it appears the family business was somewhat lucrative with a good source of income and stability. Nonetheless, they left. Immediately. They turned and got behind Jesus who went before them. They answered the call and their lives were forever changed.

We, too, are called. Just as we sang in our opening hymn (ELW 674). Called to act with justice. Called to love tenderly. Called to serve one another. Called to walk humbly with God. Called to be light for the kingdom, to live in the freedom of the city of God. We, too, are called to be hope for the hopeless so hatred and blindness will be no more. We, too, are called to walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love. We are called.

This call isn't easy. Hearing that infomercial, reading the whole of Mark's gospel, knowing what we know – it's a wonder we don't walk away. Give up! Throw our hands in the air and say we just can't do it anymore. It's too daunting of a task. We don't have enough resources. We're tired and weary, Jesus! Send someone else, please.

People of God, I am always astounded by your faithfulness to serve your Lord. I am always amazed that when God calls, you respond to God's grace with an abundance of financial gifts. I know the call Jesus has issued to us isn't easy. At times, it's downright frightening. Intimidating. Lonely. Exhausting. Confusing. Challenging. It's all too easy to wonder if it even makes a difference in a world full of so much hatred, evil, illness, hunger, war, and death.

It's not easy. But, faithful people of God, persist. Don't give up. Don't walk away because your wants and expectations aren't always met. Don't give up on a brother or sister who has hurt you. Don't stop proclaiming the good news when it seems no one is listening or accepting your invitation to come and see what God is doing. Don't give in to the temptation to sit idle and just assume someone else will do it. Don't let fear of trying something new or stepping outside of your comfort zone deter you from encountering the love of Christ in a totally new way or Jesus using you in a way you never thought possible.

Remember your calling. Remember the invitation to "come and follow."

Remember you are never alone. Remember the words of "do not be afraid."

Remember Jesus blesses those who do his will. Remember, Jesus continues to us

even when we do fail. He loves us. He loves you. He doesn't give up on us. He doesn't desert us. This call isn't easy but it's so important because it's His call. It's God's call. You are called. We are called to act with justice. We are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another. We are called to walk humbly with God.