



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR B, JANUARY 24, 2021  
JONAH 3:1-5, 10; PSALM 62:6-14; MARK 1:14-20

## COME AS YOU ARE

**Mark: 1:14-20** [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 him.]

I know I am not the only one here this morning who has been delighted by the vast creativity of the Bernie memes this past week. And by Bernie memes, I mean pictures from Inauguration Day of a seated Senator Bernie Sanders wearing a quite casual warm winter jacket and thick knitted mittens; it was hilariously photoshopped into all kinds of wonderful backgrounds, from the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon to the Beatles Abbey Road album cover to the Apollo Moon Landing. I’ve enjoyed these immensely clever memes because they’re fun and not mean-spirited, and Senator Sanders himself has received them with good humor: “You know,

in Vermont, we dress warm, we know something about the cold.”

But the award-winning author and analyst Naomi Klein did a deeper dive into what she dubbed “mittenology.” She explored *five* possible meanings of Bernie Sanders’s mittens – from warning to street cred, and asked: “Why did so many millions connect to whatever language the mittens were speaking?” – and ultimately concluded “... this had nothing to do with anything Bernie did — other than be Bernie in the only way he knows how...<sup>1</sup>

To which a commenter tweeted: “Ok, but seriously, guys, what if his hands were just cold and he had mittens.”<sup>2</sup>

EXACTLY the same thing!

My husband Jim read me that comment as I sat at our table writing this sermon, and we both laughed out loud. But I say to you that the author and the commenter ended up saying the same thing about BEING and meaning.

Where does meaning that catches fire come from? And is ordinariness okay? Is there a difference between doing what we’re called to and being who we are? I’m feeling all of those questions knitted into the “mittenology” wool, so to speak – and into the Scriptures we read today.

Are there layers of meaning in holy Scripture? Surely. But sometimes, aren’t people just cold, and that’s why they put mittens on? Surely. But something in ordinariness catches fire, and captures the imagination of the Twitterverse, or the ragtag followers, or the gathered crowd of 5,000, or the centuries of seekers...

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Can you just imagine how **that** phrase would have become a meme? And actually... don’t you think it has? It’s one of the sentences and

images from the Gospels that we all know, that is almost ubiquitous in our Western culture that grew up tied to Christianity.

The calling of the disciples is in all four Gospels, and Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relay some language of “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.” It’s significant! Now, Mark is our shortest Gospel, and he does not wax eloquent about this encounter of the calling of Simon and Andrew and James and John. He just says Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he saw these men, and he said, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” – and off they went.

What catches our attention about it, then, that we all know this call so well, this “Follow me?” And what do WE do about it? Is Jesus calling US onto this path, to follow and be fishers of people? I surely think so. But who are we supposed to be to do that? AH, now that’s the question in the *call*.

The call to follow. The call to fish. Who are these folks that Jesus called, and why? Do we have to be like the saints, or can we just be a guy in mittens on a cold day being himself?

Well, what was so special about Simon and Andrew and James and John? At this point in the story, we don’t know, do we? Imagine, just for a moment, that you’re hearing this story of Jesus for the first time. That you don’t know what’s going to happen in the narrative

of Jesus. What you do know so far in Mark's Gospel is that John was baptizing people, and Jesus came down to be baptized, and God's voice spoke, "This is my beloved Son." Then Jesus went into the wilderness, and after John was imprisoned, Jesus came out and went around Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. I have barely left anything out of Mark's telling here. Then Jesus passed by and saw these fishermen, and called to them, "Follow me." They're just fishermen. Not rabbis or officials or prominent folk.

Not knowing where the story is going, we wonder, "Why them?" We just don't know, but we're eager to find out! It must be that they are super special in some amazing ways, to be called close to Jesus. And Jesus must have some special way of knowing how special they are. Simon Peter must be the smartest guy ever! James and John must be so good with people. Then, ah... nope. As we keep reading, we'll find out Peter doesn't always "get it" at all, and James and John, the Sons of Thunder, have visions of heavenly grandeur – for themselves.

And yet these are the first ones called. Did Jesus not know what he was doing?

We find out Jesus knew exactly whom he was calling. He called them to live into their very real, ordinary flawed selves, their HEARTS, and use whatever gifts were authentically

theirs, to follow him and bring others to him and change things. And they did. *That's* the path. Theirs... and **ours**.

Jesus calls you and me into relationship as we are, too. Jesus knew the apostles weren't going to get it all together. But he called them. Their deepest selves had the capacity to respond, and to share their following of Jesus. "Follow me," he said. That's all of our paths. And Jesus knows exactly who we are, so we have no "out" from it, in claiming we're not the smartest, or not the most cool-headed, or haven't got it all together... The invitation to us is to go deep into our hearts – to not be afraid to look in there, past the surface things about ourselves that we hang our hats on, without ego AND without shame – and to recognize what Jesus sees and why the Spirit calls.

"What am I called to do" can be such an excruciating question when we face life decisions. The author and educator Parker Palmer writes that we have this idea that a calling "asks us to become someone we are not yet – someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach."<sup>3</sup> But Palmer describes how his life changed when he discovered for himself that the call **is** "accepting the treasure of true self I already possess...calling me to be the person I was

born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.”<sup>4</sup>

That sounds lovely, right? As if he’s saying, “Don’t worry about it. YOU do YOU.” But here’s the rub: Palmer goes on to say that the call to accept the gift of your selfhood “turns out to be even more demanding than attempting to become someone else...<sup>5</sup>– BUT that “inner work, though it is a deeply *personal* matter, is not necessarily a *private* matter: inner work can be helped along in community.”<sup>6</sup>

THAT is good news – and I would go so far as to say that **part** of doing inner work **must** be helped along in community. The Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron wrote that “the fixed idea that we have about ourselves as solid and separate from each other is painfully limiting.” Stretching beyond that limit: isn’t that what we do here in a faith community – as we seek deeper relationship with God and each other, going deeper into our hearts together? The quiet place we find in ourselves

in our personal prayer and meditations is shared and fed in relationship with each other, in our worship, in our studies and conversations and actions.

What happens is that inner work bubbles over into what we’re called to do – how we “be” -- in the world! Becoming fishers of people by the way we live. So, a Mahatma Gandhi doesn’t have to say: “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

So where is your authentic path, being called as a follower of Jesus? It’s exactly where you are today, because, well, it IS the path you ARE on, right now. There’s nowhere else you CAN start. It’s as simple as that. Do you find you’ve taken some funky turns along the way to be where you are right now? Maybe so. Probably so, for most of us.

But, right now, you are standing in a boat and Jesus is passing by saying anyway, “Follow me” – to YOU. Make THAT meme-worthy.

<sup>1</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2021/01/21/inauguration-bernie-sanders-mittens/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/andizeisler/status/1352531011972685824?s=03>

<sup>3</sup> Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 2000. p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>7</sup> Chodron, Pema. *The Pocket Pema Chodron*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala. 2007. P. 35.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22155-i-like-your-christ-i-do-not-like-your-christians#>: