

The Calling of the Disciples (Downtown)

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Date: 03 October 2021

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[0 : 00] So, I want to start off my sermon with a little bit of a confession. I absolutely cannot stand disruptions.

There is nothing that gets under my skin more than being in the middle of a task and having to interrupt what I'm doing to do something else. Probably something that I didn't even want to do in the first place.

And I think that that is part of the reason why I absolutely hate phone calls. I kind of make it my life's mission to avoid answering the phone.

Kind of a typical millennial in that way. If you text me, I'll probably answer it right away. Unless, of course, I'm in that state of mind where, you know, I look at it, I see it.

I'll be like, oh, I'll answer that later. And then it goes, wherever unanswered text messages go to die. And the productivity-loving nerd in me loves having a clear inbox.

[0 : 58] So, just for the satisfaction of having an inbox zero, I'll probably respond to your email right away. But when you send me a phone call or I get a phone call, this meme is basically my reaction.

If Skylar can put it up. Yeah. Yeah. So, I am a bit of an overthinker.

So, I've asked myself many times, like, okay, why do I hate phone calls so much? This doesn't make sense. I'm an adult. Why can't I just answer the phone like a normal human being? And I think part of it is that, like, oh, I'm just, like, doing work or more likely just, like, doom scrolling on my phone.

And my phone lights up with a call. And I have to be like, okay, is this a spam call? Is this someone I know and I just forgot to put them in my phone? Is this, like, a good conversation or will it be bad news?

Most of the time when I get a phone call, it's bad news. So, it's just, like, an inconvenience. And it's a disruption. But as we will learn in our scripture for today, the kingdom of God is all about disruption.

[2 : 11] So, without any further ado, I would like you to, if you have a Bible, flip it open or turn it on and go to Mark chapter 1, verses 14 through 20.

And I was joking with Pastor Anthony and a couple other folks that there's something very official about carrying a Bible on the stage with you.

Like, it just is so satisfying. So, without further ado, I will start in verse 14, which reads, 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 they followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John, who were in their boat, mending their nets.

[3 : 22] Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and they followed him. So, one thing that always strikes me about the Gospel of Mark, as I'm reading it, is how quickly everything seems to happen.

Here we are, we're only in the 20th verse of this entire book. And I could just run through a list of everything that has happened. It's the proclamation of the good news of God.

John arrives on the scene, and he's saying that he's baptizing people, and he's saying that there's one coming who is more powerful than I. And then Jesus arrives on the scene, and he's baptized.

And then he's immediately driven into the wilderness, where he's waited upon by angels and tempted by the devil. And then John is arrested, and Jesus starts proclaiming the good news of

God.

And he calls the disciples, and they immediately follow him. And all of this has happened in a few short verses. And given the breakneck pace of this Gospel, which is leading us toward the cross, it has kind of left me with this question.

[4 : 31] For those of you who may not know, if you haven't grown up in church, the Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was about in his 30s when he started his ministry.

And I've always wondered, like, what took you so long, Jesus? It kind of makes me feel better for being only 27 and being in ministry.

But that said, like, why? And I think that verse 14 offers us a bit of a clue. It says, Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

And so I've noticed that everything that Mark puts in this Gospel is so intentional. Everything is there for a reason. So I can't help but think that the arrest of John and the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the start of Jesus' ministry, is related somehow.

And so my thought is that perhaps Jesus was disrupted by this injustice. Maybe he saw that, okay, John was proclaiming this good news, and now he can no longer do so.

[5 : 39] So now is the time for me to do it. And I just can't help but wonder what was going on in Jesus' head when he heard the news that John was arrested. Was he shocked?

Was he angry? Was he upset? Did he somehow expect it? We don't know. But what we do know is that perhaps Jesus was disrupted by this injustice.

And that was the impetus for Jesus to proclaim this good news. And so what strikes me is that he looked at this broken system that would put an innocent man in prison, and he declared that there is a new and a better way.

And that leads me to the main point of today, which is how I will be kind of framing our entire discussion. And that is that Jesus' ministry of the kingdom of God was about disrupting the unjust social order for the sake of creating a new social order.

And so in verse 15, Jesus says, And this word for time used here is kairos.

[6 : 50] I believe it will be on the screen. And this word is fascinating to me because kairos is not about chronological time. Instead, it's about those pivotal moments in our lives that come along and change everything that happened after.

And so I was doing some reading for seminary. If you don't know, I'm in seminary. I'm in my final year. And I came across this quote in this book by Kelly Douglas Brown in her book, Stand Your Ground, Black Bodies and the Justice of God.

And in this book, she describes kairos time perfectly. She writes, Kairos time is the right or opportune time. It is a decisive moment in history that potentially has far-reaching impact. It is often a chaotic period, a time of crisis. However, it is through the chaos and crisis that God is fully present, disrupting things as they are and providing an opening to a new future, to God's future.

Kairos time is, therefore, a time pregnant with infinite possibilities for new life. Kairos time is God's time. It is a time bursting forth with God's call to a new way of living in the world.

[8 : 13] And so Jesus began his ministry. He proclaimed these words to the Jewish people, to the nation of Israel. And they were well aware of chaos and crisis.

He declares these words to a culture that is desperate for a change. Because all throughout the Hebrew scriptures, we read that the Jewish people are kind of locked in this cycle of exile, conquest, and exploitation.

And just when they think that they are free, just when they think that they obtain liberation, there they are thrown right back into oppression again. And so the Hebrew scriptures, especially prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel, are dripping with allusions to this time when everything would be made right again.

When they would be freed from oppression and free to live this new way of life. And in just one example, Daniel chapter 7, verse 22, we read, The ancient one came, then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High.

And the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom. So Jesus spoke these words to a culture that had already been longing for this new beginning for hundreds of years.

[9 : 27] And he declared that now is the time that you choose. Will you choose the way of the empire? And the way of the empire is all about pain and injustice and suffering.

Or will you choose the way of the kingdom of God? And the way of the kingdom of God is about love and justice and mercy. And the kingdom of God is invading the kingdom of this world. And there's nothing that we can do to stop it. All we can do is figure out, will we participate in it or not? And so the nation of Israel faced this choice.

But we ourselves are also faced with this choice today. And I want to share a little bit about my personal story and a Kairos moment that I experienced.

For me, one of the most formative Kairos moments of my life was shortly after I graduated from college in 2016. And we all know what was going on in 2016.

[10:29] It's like, remember when we thought that the election of Donald Trump would be the worst thing that would happen to us? We weren't exactly wrong. But none of us could have foreseen a global pandemic or a riot on the Capitol or fill in the blank here with your tragedy or apocalypse of the week.

But back then, back in 2016, when this was all just beginning to happen, I found it hard to reconcile my belief in the God of mercy and love with the way that so many Christians I knew supported someone who went against everything that Jesus lived and died for.

So I was really struggling and questioning a lot about what I had grown up to believe and what it meant to be a Christ follower today. And I was thinking so much about, you know, the culture that I grew up in.

And there was so many great things about the faith tradition that I had. I was instilled from a very young age about the importance of Scripture and how it's important for our lives to be oriented around Scripture.

And I was taught about things like important values like truth and integrity and love and mercy and compassion. All of these values that are still so formative to me today.

[11:54] But at the same time, as they were teaching me all of these things, I just had so many questions. Because as I was reading the Scripture, I saw this focus on social justice and being on the margins and making sure that life was abundant for all.

And yet that was not what I saw. Many people told me that there was no connection between the social justice and the gospel. And it was all about going to heaven after you die and not about how you live your life here in the present.

And it seemed more about being separate from the world rather than actively engaged in the sin and suffering all around us. And so that's not even getting into the fact that they taught me very harmful messages about LGBTQ plus inclusion.

And how I couldn't reconcile the idea of a God of love with the kind of exclusionary messages that I heard. The God of love, if God is love, then loving someone cannot possibly be wrong.

And similarly, I remember being told messages about how women were not allowed to be pastors. And a big part of my journey towards becoming a pastor is learning how to tune out those voices and to reject those messages.

[13:19] Even though they are messages that I still hear to this day. And I know that I will continue to hear them throughout my life in ministry. It's just the fact of life.

But through all of this, I was faced with this choice. I could choose the way of the empire. And I could choose to, you know, go along with what my faith tradition taught me and kind of go along. Or I could choose what was ever more clearly becoming the path that I needed to follow, which was the path of the kingdom of God. And this kingdom of love and justice and mercy.

And so standing in front of you today, you kind of know how my story ends or where it is now. But it could have easily gone in a different direction.

And so in that moment, there was a choice to be made. And I think some of us may be able to relate to that. But even if you can't relate to that specific instance, all of us have Kairos moments in our lives.

[14:26] The pandemic is like the biggest one I can think of. It's like if you look up Kairos in the dictionary, the pandemic would be like right there. It's like that moment of chaos and crisis.

And for some of us, although not enough of us, the protests against George Floyd and Breonna Taylor's murders were a Kairos moment. But like I said, not enough of us.

But for yet more of us, our Kairos moments are more personal. Maybe it's a death in the family or the death of someone close to you. It could be the loss of a job or the loss of an opportunity, that dream opportunity that slips through your fingers.

Or it could be a phone call that shatters your world. And I can tell you that each of those events has happened to me. So while I cannot relate to the specifics, I can relate to some of what you're feeling because I walked in those shoes.

But what has become clear to me in those moments is that every day as we are surrounded by these moments of chaos and crisis, we can choose how we respond.

[15 : 38] And we can see also that God chooses us. He chooses people like you and like me and like fishermen. I don't know about you, but fishermen would not be my first choice of someone to call to be my disciples.

But that's exactly who Jesus calls. And this reminds me of a passage from 1 Corinthians 1. I will start in verse 26, and the words will be on the screen.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world.

Things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. And so the fishermen were definitely not wise by human standards.

[16 : 47] They were not powerful. They were not of noble birth. They existed on subsistence level, which meant that they basically only earned enough to support their family.

And like Zebedee, they could maybe hire a few extra people to help with the haul. But that's basically it. And fishing was hard work. Like, they had to work at night because that's when the fish were out.

And it was dirty, smelly, kind of gross. Not my first choice for career. But what's more important for us to realize is that their labor really was not their own.

They served the interests of the Roman Empire. They served the powerful. And, yeah, the work that they did was not for them. It was for people higher up than them.

But Jesus saw them. And we read that he called the fishermen to follow. And so Jesus disrupted the fishermen and called them out of their ordinary lives, or within their ordinary lives, I should say.

[17 : 55] But I have noticed that it required them to leave behind so much. They left behind their family. They left behind their livelihood to follow a path that was inherently uncertain.

And they were faced with this choice. Would they choose the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of God? And they chose the kingdom of God without hesitation.

And so one of my questions has always been, why? And the only answer that I can really find is through looking at it through the lens of my own life.

And so I have had to ask myself, why am I still a Christian? Why does this faith still matter to me?

And I think the only answer that has ever made sense to me is the character of Jesus, who doesn't coerce us, but that lovingly compels us into relationship with him.

And Jesus is worth following with everything I have. The way of Jesus is worth sacrificing for. And this has not been easy. Because as I have followed Christ and long to follow Christ more and more, that has required me to leave behind the expectations of my family, who are perhaps not too happy with the fact that I've become more progressive.

[19 : 16] And, you know, some members of my family, the people who are closest to me, do not really support my call to become a pastor because of my gender.

And this is something that I still have to contend with to this day. But through all of that, I have realized that the story of Jesus is still the story that I'm willing to risk everything for.

And in the words of a beloved Saint, Rachel Held Evans, it is the story that I am willing to be wrong about. But I want us to go back to the scripture.

And it says that Jesus calls them to follow so that they will become fishers of men. And so Jesus disrupts them for a purpose, for a goal.

He's not just, like, trying to get people to follow him because he wants people to follow him around all the time. No, he's calling them so that they can be a part of what Jesus is doing. And that work is fishing.

[20 : 22] And so looking at this, one of the things I love so much about scripture is that it takes on a slightly different meaning depending on how you look at it.

And it's a bit like a prism in that way. Well, like, if you hold it up to the light and, like, tilt it slightly, it takes on a slightly different meaning. So looking at this phrase, follow me and I will make you fish

for people.

If you've grown up in any sort of evangelical circles, you've probably heard this phrase being used to refer to this idea of, like, saving souls, or, like, bringing people into eternal life in heaven.

And I don't know about you, but that language has always made me a little uncomfy. But that's not really what Jesus is talking about here. He's not divorcing the soul from the whole person.

Instead, he's saying, I want you to catch people like you used to catch fish. I want you to see people, to know them, and to call them into this relationship, this community, this family.

[21 : 30] The kingdom of God is like this big, broad net that brings in everyone, people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds and experiences, and calls them into a community of people, calls them into a family.

But then I read it again. I will make you fish for people. Fish for people. In other words, another way to look at this is on behalf of people.

So remember how I said that the fishermen's labor did not belong to them, that they were in service to the Roman Empire. One way to look at this is that it requires people to consider the work that they're doing and why they're doing it.

Is their labor exploiting others? Or is it bringing us into a collaborative way of being where our labor helps those who maybe don't have as much or serves everyone rather than the interests of the powerful?

I think that that's part of what Jesus is getting at here. But Jesus calling the fishermen in this way, despite the fact that he uses this language that they're very comfortable with, fishing, like Jesus calling the fishermen challenges everything that they thought they knew.

[22 : 47] And it invites them to participate in the creation of this new social order and this new family. But one thing, the last thing that I really want to touch on today is that the disciples don't know what this will look like.

They think that they do, but they don't. And I don't know, some of you were at Pastor Richard's sermon at Gala this morning. But one point that he made was that Jesus calling the disciples is not about a call into a vocation.

Instead, it's about a new identity. And it's about a process of becoming. So in this call, the disciples don't know what the end result will be.

They don't know what they're signing up for. But they make the decision to follow anyway. And I often think about how the disciples probably thought, many people probably thought, like the Israelites and the Jews of that time thought that perhaps Jesus would come at the head of an army. And he would violently overthrow the Roman Empire and create this earthly kingdom. But that's not what Jesus is doing. And we'll learn throughout the Gospel of Mark that pretty much the only thing the disciples ever got right was the fact that they made the decision to follow Jesus in the first place.

[24 : 11] The rest of the book, they don't believe Jesus when he tells them certain things about the future. They make mistakes. They question Jesus.

They exhibit a lack of knowledge. All of these things. And Jesus works through their imperfection. But what they don't understand is that the way of Jesus is the way of the cross.

And it is through the cross that Jesus fulfills this vision for a new way of being in the world. And that is something that we will kind of tease out the implications of in future weeks.

But for now, I just want us to take a moment at the close of my sermon to think about what disruption looks like in our lives.

And for me, going back to the me of three years ago, when I was kind of questioning my faith, wondering what God had in store for me, and yet feeling this call into a new way of being.

[25 : 17] I got the opportunity to come to D.C. to intern at a medical respite facility for homeless individuals with HIV. And this was something completely outside of my comfort zone.

I had no idea what I was doing. One thing to know is that I have a medical phobia. So I hate needles.

I hate the sight of blood. I faint when I'm in pain. And so God calling me into the medical field was not exactly what I thought that he would do for that period of my life.

And I had a panic attack at my first appointment with a resident. So believe me when I tell you that it was entirely God and not me, leading me to that point. But through this process, through that experience of three years of being in that space, I just have been toying with the idea of the disruptions of the kingdom and the idea of fishing for people and what it means to really inhabit

those disruptions.

And so I've had many disruptions over the course of those three years. But one of them just happened this Friday morning. Yeah, it's one of those funny things where if you're preparing for a sermon, everything you do reminds you of that sermon.

[26 : 46] And so on Friday, I was at work kind of going through my normal day. You know, I had that idea in my head about what my day would be like. And one of our year-long interns came in, and he told me that there was someone outside who wanted to donate some clothes to us.

And so I was like, well, I don't think we need clothes. But I was like, okay, I'll go outside and, like, talk to this man and see what he has, see if we can take it. But it turns out that that was only really part of the story.

And there was so much more going on underneath the surface. Because as I talked to this man, he started talking about a mental health diagnosis that he had.

And he started talking about how his fear that there was something wrong with his building. And there was some question of, like, how much of it was in his head versus how much of it was real and his concern that maybe he was going through some sort of episode.

And so in that moment, I was really faced with this, like, mini Kairos moment, where I could choose to meet this man where he was, meet the need that was in front of me, or kind of, like, deflect and kind of be like, okay, I can't help you.

[28 : 01] I can't do any of this. And so in that choice, yeah, it was just a moment where I could decide to choose connection or not.

And so me and another intern decided, okay, we'll call 911, get someone to check out his building. We gave him a glass of water, and then we sent him on his way. And I tell that story because, to me, those moments of connection, those moments of disruption to our day are a sign of the kingdom of God breaking into this reality.

It's a sign of meeting people where they are, and even if you never see them again, knowing that I did what I could for that man in that moment.

And there are so many times in my life where I would not have taken that opportunity. But as I was talking to someone else at work, he said, oh, the moments that I regret are not the moments that I engage with that disruption.

The moments I regret are the ones where I don't, and I wonder what would have happened if I did. And I think that that is so true. And so those moments of disruption that we have are the call to participate in the kingdom.

[29 : 23] Just like the disciples found out, making the decision to follow Christ does not mean that we're suddenly fixed or healed or that a roadmap appears in front of us. Jesus doesn't appear with a five-year plan for establishing the kingdom of God.

And right now, I really wish that he did. Um, yeah, people know what I mean. Kind of foreshadowing my last point. But right now, I am in this stage of my life where I really don't know what's next.

I kind of feel like the pandemic has robbed me of a year of my life that I can't get back. And I wonder what my life would have been like without it. Um, and also, I am in my last year of seminary.

And if I've talked to you, um, you know that I'm going through a bit of senioritis right now where I would much rather be done and on to the next thing. Um, and I just, I don't know what the next year or month or day or hour has in store for me.

Um, and I think I'm at a stage of my life where it is tempting for me to believe that the way things are now are the way things will always be. Um, but that's not the case.

[30 : 39] And none of us really know what the next year or month or day or hour has in store for us. We think that we do, but we don't. We would like to come up with a plan and have a checklist of what we want to get accomplished.

Um, but sometimes life has other plans. And, and what is, is freeing to me is to realize that sometimes God has other plans. That sometimes God is disrupting our lives.

And I would rather have God's disruption rather than the disruptions of the world. I would rather be disrupted by God rather than this never ending cascade of bad news.

And so I want us to consider what that might look like because the time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. And, and God's kingdom is the one that gives us the courage and the strength to pursue this new way of being in the world.

It calls us into this new family and it calls us to participate in the work that God is doing in our midst. And God works through the disruptions in our lives for that glimmer of the kingdom of God. [31 : 53] And so I have just one simple question. How is God disrupting your life? It's not a question of if God is disrupting your life.

God is always trying to speak to you. God is always trying to get your attention, whether that's through injustice or whether it's through the work that you do or the everydayness of our lives. God is always calling us to participate in the work that God is doing and to be part of this new family. So I just want us to ask, as you go through your week, just ask yourself, God, how are you disrupting me?

And let me tell you, God will answer that question. He'll show you how he's disrupting your life. But then ask yourself, what am I called to do or become in response to this disruption?

So I want to remind you, God, how am I called it? We'll start again using the chat directory. So I want to thank you for a question. We'll show you how sheOK is when we're doing something that breaks into action. We'll ask you before we get to the mission. And we have to be done because you've sent to your server, the blockchain and the alliance with a fire. That's right, the key Av■ d'ham is the key part of this disruption. So that's not true for the ■■, but that's really personal connection with the connection. So that's the way it's increasing and with a wonderful location. And so our family and women are all connecting and women are letting social connections.

[32 : 59] It's coming in and so culture and theDB will pause it. So I see what's going through. Oh, that'll we get you almost done?