

**First Baptist Church of Augusta**  
**Mark 1:14-20**  
***Walk This Way: My Way or Your Way***  
**July 20, 2008**

Mark 1:14-20

*14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16 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. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.*

Baseball philosopher, Yogi Bearer once quipped, "When there is a fork in the road, take it." Everyday at every moment is confronted with choices, where we are called to decide, which way. Jesus said, "*I am the way...*" (John 14:3), yet we are easily confused, confounded or otherwise befuddled, amidst all the other ways and choices convincingly presented. In this seven part series of messages, we journey with Peter and the other disciples along the way of the "footsteps of the fisherman" to walk this way.

Twenty times in all four gospels Jesus directly extends the invitation to "Follow me." He invites fishermen to be apostles, crowds to be disciples, and individuals to change their direction and follow. Jesus invites a dead man to walk out of the tomb, a blind man to see, and a lame man to walk. It was Jesus who looked into the eyes of an adulterer, and invited her to forgiveness and to sin no more. At Jacob's well, He sat and invited a Samaritan to see beyond her prejudice and worship God in spirit and truth.

Jesus is inviting us to to do something with our lives – to walk this way, His way.

Many of us, when we hear this story, imagine Jesus walking up to Peter and Andrew and all the rest and speaking to them as complete strangers. They are mending their nets and minding their business, so we think, and Jesus appears out of nowhere and says, "Follow me."

Actually, if we take into consideration the other gospel accounts of this story, Jesus in all likelihood had already spent some time with these soon-to-be disciples before this call. He shared meals with them and because Capernaum was a small village, He undoubtedly came to know many others in the fishing business, including John and James, the Zebedee brothers, as well as Peter and Andrew. A relationship was kindled before the calling.

My friend, Scott Walker, who for nearly twenty years served as the pastor of First Baptist Waco, wrote a fine book entitled *Footsteps of the Fisherman*. In it, he comments about the call of Jesus and observes that there are three distinct stages of following Jesus.

One is the Friendship Stage.

I am learning all over again what it means to make friends. This past week, my son Aaron set me up with a "Facebook" account, and now, through the power and mystery of the universe of the internet, I can interact with others as my friend. Of course, first I either have to ask someone to be my friend or I have to be asked.

Jesus begins his relationship with Peter and all the rest by befriending these disciples, earning their trust, and demonstrating to them that he was no charlatan.

Isn't this how it is with all of us who follow Jesus? It does not begin with a set of creeds or a doctrinal statement. Jesus did not appear to the fisherman out of nowhere and say, "Now before you leave your nets and join my organization, first you have to sign this list of beliefs, creeds, and confessions." Jesus enters our lives authentically by relating with us.

When I look back over my years of knowing Jesus, I have first and best known him as a friend. Like the sentimental hymn goes, "He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own." Yet, at this stage of friendship, there really is not much asked of me. I did not know when I was a child, but came to know later that there was more to this relationship.

We all start out, at least on some level, as friends in our relationship with Jesus. The incarnation of God in flesh allows this, permits this, fosters this way of knowing God.

There is another stage as we walk this way. Walker states that those who hear the call to follow Jesus move from the stage of friendship to the Apprentice Stage.

Some of you know that the name of our middle school praise and worship band is "The Apprentice." Apprentice means somebody being trained by a skilled professional in an art, craft, or trade. Many of the trade skills in construction have had apprentice-type training, such as, plumbers and electricians. In some respects, this is what a resident does once medical school is completed. Apprentice is a great name not only for budding musicians and worship leaders, but for growing in the faith as well.

This is how the fishermen we read of in the gospels learned their trade. They did not go to school and learn the art of casting nets, navigating their boats or how to make weather forecasts. They learned from their fathers or mentors by working alongside as the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of one generation was passed along to the next.

In the scriptures, we read of Jesus teaching the disciples and how they witnessed time and again his acts of healing; his taking the time to speak to distressed widows, playful children, and forsaken Samaritans. These fisherman, who once were taught by someone else how to catch fish were now learning, seeing, and experiencing what it meant to catch the lives of others.

The final stage Walker describes is the Leadership Stage. The mission and ministry that Jesus had committed and sacrificed his life for, would now be up to them. The movement of God had been trusted over to these fisherman-turned-disciples. This is something they could not have grasped that day Jesus approached their boats and said, "Follow me." At the time, they did not understand what all this meant and what all this would mean.

But now the time would come and Peter would die in Rome, John would be abandoned in Patmos, and tradition holds, that Andrew was crucified in Greece. I do not think they were ready for that on the day Jesus called, but in time they grew into it.

We grow into our faith, do we not? When we come to know Jesus, whether as a converted child following a church camp experience, or a life-changing encounter as an adult, we still grow in our faith. We do not know where it will take us, and we do not know where we will end up.

There is a contemporary dilemma: we are a spectator culture. From Lazy-Boys to stadium seats, we are accustomed to taking a place in the stands and view the show. We have even made “reality” a spectator event. For the last seven or eight years, the most popular shows on television are those that are called “reality shows.” Most of these shows border on the ridiculous: *Who Wants to be a Superhero*; *Who Wants to Date a Hooters Girl*; *Who Wants to Marry My Dad*; *Wife Swap*; *Simple Life*... Several years ago, I actually helped a youth minister who was applying to participate in the show *The Great Race*. I am not immune because for several years we watched *American Idol*. Why do so many of us like watching these programs? In part, it is because we can be spectators to something that masquerades itself as real without having to commit or participate.

When one reads through the gospels, particularly in the Gospel of Mark, one reads that discipleship is not a gaggle of admirers, but a commitment to live intentionally and be willing to give oneself all away.

Part of our confusion is, we have misunderstood or at least misappropriated church activities with following Jesus. It is easy to think that going to worship, or attending Sunday School or tithing or serving on a committee is the same thing as following Jesus. Of course, I think that being active in the church is important and I in no way want to minimize church involvement. Following Jesus, however, is not about a subject to object action. Following Jesus is not about busy-ness. Following Jesus is not about loyalty to an organization. Following Jesus is a *transformation* of one’s life. It necessitates a change of path altogether.

This morning, I invite you to begin the journey if you have not done so. As simple as this may sound, Jesus wants to be your friend because this is where it begins. Jesus, however, wants to be more than a friend, more than a spectator. We are invited to grow and become and follow.

There are some of you here this morning where God is, inviting you to move into the deep waters of a relationship with Jesus, to put down your nets and go places you can scarcely imagine. This is in part what we have asked of Jake Malone, and so, now he comes to serve as our new Church Administrator. This is what we have asked of Zihna Edwards, and so, she has moved from Arizona to be with us for the next two years. This is what led me to walk the aisle of First Baptist Eatonton as an 18 year old and enter into full-time ministry to the church. I had no idea where it would take me. Later, I would learn that it would take me as far away as the Philippine Islands and as close by as Augusta.

Through it all, Jesus has been my friend. Jesus taught me and teaches me still. Jesus is leading me day by day and moment by moment to lay the nets of the predictable aside and walk His way. When Jesus said to me, “Come, follow me,” I had no idea where this would take me. I still do not, but I have staked my life in trusting the journey.

How about you?