

## Sermon: Time's Up

Year B, Epiphany 3

[Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20](#)

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*The time is fulfilled.* (Mark 1:15) Time's up. The bell has gone off. Who are you? When you get right down to it, we are usually a bunch of things that weave together. I'm a numbers guy. I'm a musician. I'm an American. For my sins, I'm a Cleveland Browns fan. Many of those kinds of things we can set aside or dial down. Although, last Saturday as I headed south from Dotty Haight's funeral, I passed a ... vehicle ... a rolling work of art ... a converted food truck with every square inch dedicated to the Patriots, heading down Route 3 to tailgate at Gillette Stadium. It would take a lot for those people to set aside being Patriots fans.

The answers that we don't set aside so easily are usually identities tied to relationships. I am not *a* daughter. I am Anne & John's daughter. I am Sarah's sister. I am Anna & Ben's aunt. I can't tell you what it means to be Anne & John's daughter, but apparently it means cleaning up the programming on their Tivo. It means teaching them how to text on an iPhone. It means exploring the gastro-intestinal system of Netflix to figure out where they are in the Madame Secretary series. It used to mean studying my Latin verbs. Or returning my library books. Or swimming as hard as I could at the YMCA meet for the Sea Stars. And then it meant paying back my graduate school debt. And buying my own car, a 1986 Chevy Chevette, there was a piece of automotive engineering. It meant finding a career I was good at and I was productive in and doing right by the people I worked with and worked for. For every moment that I have been Anne & John's daughter, there has been a whole lifetime of learning that goes into remaining true to that identity.

That's why it's so heart breaking, I think, when people come to the point of divorce. I cannot be a wife as I understand that role and be your wife, because you are asking me to learn how to do things that I cannot reconcile with my understanding of what being a wife in the present moment means. Being a wife means bringing my strength to this marriage and I cannot be strong if you are telling me infidelity doesn't matter. What we lose in divorce is more than a relationship. We lose a part of our identity. We let go of a definition of who we are in the moment and we let go of the ongoing learning it takes to live into that definition. Identity in the moment and life learning to live into that definition.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes it takes someone on the outside telling you something you could never put into words on your own. You are an artist. You are a racist. You are an alcoholic. There comes a moment when someone on the outside lays out the truth so clearly that you can never go back to the moment before that one, when you weren't that thing. And once you are on the other side of that moment, once you know you are an artist or a racist or an alcoholic, you start learning how to live into that definition. You learn to take the time to express yourself visually, even if it would be quicker not to. You learn a whole new set of jokes, and find a whole new set of people to hang out with. You learn a whole new set of skills you never needed before when the martinis would make all those problems go away.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Barrett, "Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Theological Perspective, Mark 1:14-20" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 288.

In today's reading we first meet Simon and Andrew, James and John. They were fishing. And then Jesus of Nazareth, who has never done anything particularly messiah like, never healed any one, never cast out a demon, never performed a miracle, rolls up. In fact, so far, he's been baptized by John the Baptizer, who, by the way, was just arrested, so that's no Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. He's been baptized in the Jordan and he's gone into the desert for 40 days and nights. That's what he's done. This Jesus of Nazareth guy shows up on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and says, "Follow me." The bell has gone off. Time's up. The time is fulfilled. Who are you?

And suddenly, they are no longer fishermen. Or they are no longer just fishermen. The translation here is smooth but makes more sense to me if we do it literally. "Follow me" Jesus says, "and I will make you to become fishers of people."<sup>2</sup> Jesus isn't going to make them fish for people. That's a task.<sup>3</sup> That's something you can do next Tuesday after spinning class. That's something we can make a signup sheet for and get everyone to take a shift, as if we were going to take turns sitting on Lake Potanipo with an ice augur and a bucket of shiners. To become fishers of people is to change their identity.

What have they done to become disciples of Jesus, become fishers of people? Nothing. They have done nothing. They have said nothing. They have no special skills. They have shown no particular aptitude.<sup>4</sup> In fact, we will find as we read the rest of the Gospel of Mark, they are singularly unqualified to be disciples of Jesus. Why, then, are they disciples of Jesus? Because he called them.<sup>5</sup> He chose them. And they recognized the truth in what he said. They were the people who followed him. In a moment, they knew that. And they put down their nets. They put down the thing they were good at, or at least able to earn a living at, and followed him.

Some of us are still seeking for that moment when our identity changes and we know, we know, that Jesus has chosen us. I want that moment for you, just so you can be sure. But I also know from what you have told me of being a parent, most of you were parents well before that moment of being a mom or a dad happened. You were learning everything you could learn how to do and then this little human, this hatchling who probably couldn't say anything yet looked at you in a certain way, cried out for you in a certain way, and you thought, "I'm a dad. I'm a mom. I'll figure it out." So while we tell this story of being called as disciples as a moment of transition, of going from one life to another *immediately* (Mark 1:18), let's also be clear that being called as a disciple is a lifetime of learning, a lifetime of figuring out what it means.

Make no mistake. Jesus has chosen you. Not because of what you know or what you do or what you've said. Jesus has just chosen you. Jesus has said to you, "Follow me." Somehow, you have recognized that as true, at least enough that you will show up on a Sunday morning to hear more. Jesus has chosen you and you have accepted his invitation to become a fisher of people. That's what stewardship is. When you take the preciousness of that moment, of that instant of laying aside a life without Jesus and decide to live a life with Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Ted A. Smith, "Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Homiletical Perspective, Mark 1:14-20" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 289.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 289.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, 288.

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, 286.

We're going to have our Annual Meeting next week. I think it will be a powerful time where we will actively listen for Jesus' call to us as individuals and as a community. We are not being called because of anything we do super well. Jesus is calling us to become fishers of people because that is now part of who we are. There are open positions on many of the boards and if you want to join a board and there isn't an open slot, we'll figure it out. If you want to try your hand at being a trustee or a deacon or any of the other positions, please do. But more than that, commit to the lifelong learning it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. None of us have any innate skills at following him. None of us know what exactly is next or where we'll end up when we do follow him. But live into the moment of being called by Jesus. Steward the reality of that call by learning some new skills you never knew you had before. Learn how to become a fisher of people. Learn how to help others hear that moment of "Follow Me." The bell has gone off. Time's up. The time is fulfilled. Who are you?