

## Call and Journey

Towards the end of the previous chapter I suggested that the gift of God's love frees us to accept Jesus' invitation to travel with him as he moves through the world and across our lives. Mark 1:16-20 can bring this home to us.

And passing by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

As you turn this over in your heart it is at first very familiar. But as this listening deepens it can begin to jar us. The call of Jesus comes out of the blue. As it is presented here in Mark, this is the first meeting between Jesus and his future disciples. He comes up to them, calls them and immediately, without a word of explanation, they walk away from their old lives and follow him. Once this dawns on us the familiar story that had always made sense no longer does. That drives us back to the context that Mark has prepared in the first fifteen verses, because the story makes sense only in that context.

We are dealing here with the unspeakable, literally unimaginable, hope that comes upon us from beyond and that is the fruit of God's healing and creative love. For that reason theologians would name it an eschatological call. It is

a glimpse of a way of life that is not scarred by the betrayal that mars even our most faithful living. It is a vision of a universe that makes sense, where slavery to sin is broken, where death is transformed into life, where loneliness, terror and guilt are healed. Exactly what such deep life, such a healed universe would look like, we do not know. We cannot say, though we hint at it in images: "heaven," "the banquet," "the wedding feast." But in those images, sometimes, we can glimpse it. And the glimpse of it, the living hope for it, heals our minds and begins to free our hearts for their true destiny. In the depths of our hearts we are moved in a way we cannot explain, but we know without doubt that it was for this that we were made. In our story Jesus as the Baptized One, and this is what Mark has set up in the opening verses of the gospel, as he who has been anointed in the Spirit of God, is sent to proclaim this great hope. So it is that when he speaks he cuts right through the disciples' hearts. Peter and Andrew, James and John, can't tell you exactly what has happened. But what their hearts have always longed for, what they have often looked for in the wrong place, opens before them in a flash. They follow him. And because their hearts are so full, they walk away from things that up until then had seemed so important.

As you and I listen to this story from Peter and Andrew's viewpoint, as that prayerful listening gradually seeps into us enabling us to grow into the story, it can remind us of all those times in the past when God's love touched us and filled us with an unspeakable hope. It brings back that moment when we first felt called to religious life, or when marriage started to reveal its hidden mystery. Or we recall the baptism of a child when we were filled with wild, unutterable hopes for one we loved so much; or silent moments in prayer when our heart sang, moved by a

melody of eternal stillness. Indeed, as you pray over this story now, turning it over in your heart again and again, it happens within you. You are Peter. You can hear his call, "Follow me." Right now you are the one who is being called. Beyond anything I can understand this experience breaks upon me calling me to believe that we are called to a destiny beyond our comprehension. A beloved calls me to an intimacy, a depth, a surrender, a fruition that is beyond words, but the only true homeland of my heart.

To go with him the disciples had to leave much behind, much that was good. But in terms of this great call, all will be transformed. Still, in a real sense what they most truly are will remain, for they will stay fishermen. But now they will be fishers for this mysterious Kingdom that they have glimpsed for a moment. What that will look like, or what it will cost, they do not know. Jesus will do it. "And I will make you become fishers of men." They follow him. That same call echoes now in my heart and yours, calling us to follow this mysterious One who captivates our hearts, to leave behind old ways. This is the beginning of a journey.

Matthew 14:22-33 might help us to see something of what it might look like at certain moments in the midst of this journey.

Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Once again we can listen to this from Peter's viewpoint. Peter has followed Jesus. He has listened to him and lived with him. That has brought him to the point here, where Jesus sends him out onto the sea that quickly becomes a chaos. Jesus is no longer there, and the universe howls about him. As you and I gradually move into the story this begins to remind us so much of our own lives. We, too, have tried to listen to Jesus, to follow him, to journey through life with him. Charged with his vision he has sent us out on our mission in life and we have gone out with high hopes. Then he doesn't seem to be there. Maybe it is our own life or the lives of loved ones that seem to be swamped by the frenzy. And we are so afraid. The vision of peace and integrity, of lives healed by the presence of the Lord crumbles before us. We are stunned, terrified as everything of any value seems to collapse around us and we don't know what to do.

Then we have pictured for us not just the man from Nazareth but the Anointed of the Father, the bringer of God's peace and order, striding across the seas of chaos and through our lives telling us: "Take heart, it is I: have no fear." In the very midst of the chaos he calls on us to believe that he has conquered the confusion, the awful mindless violence that crushes our world and our hearts. Here Peter has to wonder if it is a ghost, and so do we. Is this all a dream? Is my whole life of faith nothing but an illusion? Is it

only because I am too timid to face the real terrors of life, that I find myself hiding in these consoling pipe dreams of this Jesus? Then the call, the call reminiscent of that call that first stirred our hearts, is heard: "Come." Stirred to faith we leave behind the boat that protects us from the pain and confusion that whirls about us, and trusting in the One who calls us we walk safely amid the chaos.

Peter takes his eyes off Jesus; he concentrates on the strength of the wind and filled with fear he begins to sink. This, too, is so very much like us. As we sit quietly, turning the story over in our hearts, the fears that fill our lives, the places where the ingested chaos lurks, start to come to the surface. The fear of being unacceptable, of really having to take responsibility for our own lives, the unspeakable fears of failure and death surge within us. We remember how we have gone with Jesus in the past only to panic when these terrors caught us off guard. Indeed, as we live in the heart of this story we can once again feel ourselves begin to sink; but guided by the story we cry out, "Lord, save me." And he is right there with us in the midst of the story catching hold of us as we journey with him. With that some of the fear is broken; trust has entered a little deeper into us.

This theme of journeying with Jesus is central to Mark's gospel.<sup>1</sup> It is there in the very way he structures it. In the first half of the gospel Jesus invites men to believe in him and in that begin to experience the Kingdom of his Father. Very often this only leads to rejection. In 3:1-6 it is the leaders of the people. In 6:1-6 it is his own townsfolk. From Peter's profession of faith in 8:27-30, Jesus turns his face towards Jerusalem and his final destiny. With chapter 11 he enters Jerusalem. This great journey of the disciples with Jesus,

<sup>1</sup>For more on this see E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1970.

then, covers chapters 8 to 11; and as you read it there is an increasing awareness that this is parallel to our lives as believers. We, too, are on a journey with Jesus; and the individual stories have a peculiar disclosive power depending on where you are now on your journey with the Lord. Sometimes one story strikes home, sometimes another, depending on what he is doing in our hearts.

Mark 8:27-30 is that moment when Peter knows and is willing to say "You are the One."

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he charged them to tell no one about him.

At times I do see Jesus; I can say I believe in him, that he really is the Anointed One sent for me. But as verses 31-33 immediately bring out, Peter doesn't really understand this One in whom he believes, and neither do I.

And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

The way of suffering and service is exactly the opposite of what Peter wants. Jesus' invitation cuts directly against the grain.

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and he said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever

would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

The startling, frightening invitation is to leave one's very self behind. To leave fishing nets is hard. To get out of the boat that protects you from the chaos is terrifying. But to let go of one's very self? Even to open my heart to think about it brings me to the point where my life begins to dissolve. This looks like death, and like Peter I want to run away.

Then, a little later, there is the vision at the top of the mountain, unexpected, not really comprehended, just given. Yet somehow, you know this is where it all goes.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only (Mark 9:2-8).

As I pray over this I, too, begin to catch a glimpse of the One who is telling me that he is to be the Crucified One, and that I am to follow in his way; but here I see him in his glory. For a moment, unexpected, totally unearned, I see where it will go. All one can say is, "Isn't it marvelous to be here." This strengthens us; it heals our troubled hearts, to once again go back and listen to Jesus with new courage and hope. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And what has he been telling us all along? Give over one's very self.

The moment of illumination keeps us moving, but as we descend the mountain the day to day dullness takes over.