

Sunday- Jan. 24, 2021
Mark 1:14-20

Trinity Lutheran Church – Herkimer
Sermon by Rev. Edwina Landry

Caught In the Light

Words have power. They have the power to effect action, and evoke emotion. The word “immediately” is one such word. It’s used eleven times in the first chapter of Mark, and almost 60 times throughout the gospel of Mark. He uses it a lot. And it certainly grabs our attention. It means you don’t stop to think about something or weigh your options like, what you are going to wear today or what you want to eat. You don’t hesitate; you act. You stop what you’re doing and change course without even second guessing yourself. For example, if you see someone fall, you immediately run to see if he or she is okay. When we make choices this way, it might be a flight or fight response to danger as in the example I just mentioned. Sometimes, it might be in a response to a question asked and we know immediately how to respond. We don’t even think about it. But then there are times – life-altering times – when we are at a crossroads and a tough decision needs to be made. When we need to know which path would be best, and what direction to follow. It’s at these times when we usually take our time, give it deep thought, prayer, and discernment. Except, at that moment when our gut instinct, our inner wisdom, tells us exactly what to do without hesitation. Immediately, we know what to do. And it may not make any sense to us or anyone else, but we know it is the right choice even if we don’t completely know how it will all work out. It’s an immediate response, and we are caught up in this decision.

There’s a lot of being “caught up” in Mark’s gospel and in our scripture readings today. Previously, in Mark’s gospel, he tells us that after Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. No time was wasted. And when Jesus

returned from the wilderness, John the Baptist had already been arrested for speaking the truth to people of power. Yet, in the midst of that political chaos and turmoil, Jesus knew it was the right time to proclaim God's good news, and so he said perhaps the shortest sermon of any preacher on record, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." That was bold and courageous considering the political unrest at that time, but that was *exactly* why there was no time to waist. Jesus had to get this message out immediately. And he needed help with this. So he invited Simon (later known as Peter), Andrew, James, and John to be a part of this Spirit-infused mission. He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And Mark tells us that immediately they stopped what they were doing and followed him. It almost seems unbelievable doesn't it? Can you imagine making a life-changing decision like that so abruptly? Actually, I can, especially if you are caught up in something you are passionate about.

Individuals get caught up in causes all the time. We read so many stories of individuals who have been impacted – either personally or through friends or family members - by a particular illness and they are caught up in putting all their energy into that cause. Often, they will leave their full-time jobs, to pursue this new mission full-time. And I've heard and read so many stories of individuals who felt that calling to change directions in their lives and pursue a new career. Marketing majors becoming teachers, biologists becoming actors, in my case- a college administrator becoming a pastor, and in our reading today fishermen becoming missionaries. Changing directions happen all the time when something catches us like fish caught in a net. We just can't break away.

There's a lot of things that we as humans can get caught up in, and not all of them are good. Like fish searching for food, we are hungry and so we may seek out anything that will feed us even if it's not good for us, like too much sugar. Oh, it tastes good, but it's not good for our bodies. We can get caught up in following crowds that are leading us into a dangerous net of destruction that we can't break free from. We as humans can get caught up in the nets of gossip and lies and the need to

control. We can get caught up in addictions of various kinds. We can get caught up in anger that turns to hatred and mobs, and violent behavior and even death. We can get caught up in prejudice and a system of racism that we as a country are all caught up in whether we want to be a part of it or not. We can get caught up in poverty, hopelessness, and perhaps more dangerous of all apathy. We can get caught up in thinking that one person can't make a difference.

But Jesus came to show us that isn't true. One person can make a huge difference. Jesus said, "I will make you fish for people." He was saying that he would teach the disciples how to turn their energies from catching fish to catching people into God's mission. Jesus already showed them that by his example. It was the things he did and the words he spoke that touched their souls, that captivated their hearts, that caused them to repent – to turn around completely and change direction – and immediately follow him. It was the truth of God's word that spoke to the hearts of the people of Ninevah and caused them to repent and change direction from the sinful lives they were leading into God's ways. Jonah didn't have to say a lot; he didn't need eloquent or elaborate words. He only needed to speak God's truth and that was enough. That's all we have to do. We only have to speak God's truth of love and live God's truth of love by our actions to cause people to get caught up in following Jesus, in following God's path.

There's been so much talk this week about Amanda Gorman, the young poet laureate, at President Biden's inauguration. People were captivated and caught up in the words of her poem. She is an amazing young woman, an incredibly gifted poet, and yet what people are responding to is really the truth of her words that speak to the depths of our souls a divine truth. There is so much I could quote from her poem, but the last part really speaks to our scripture readings today. She said, *"We will rebuild, reconcile and recover and every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful will emerge, battered and beautiful. When day comes*

we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, If only we're brave enough to be it."

That Holy Spirit-infused truth is what speaks to people. It is what catches people. Like fish drawn to the shimmering light in the water, people will be drawn to the light that shimmers in and through us. It is the light that is a reflection of God's own light. And it is that light that will change our world for the better. It is that light that will speak to people, feed people, and allow them to see that the kingdom of God has indeed come near. Amen.