

# START

## The Start is the Hardest Part



**T**he first step can be the most frightening; the start can be the hardest part. We are “maintain” people. We can keep stuff going. But how do we get moving on something different? Maybe God is calling you to start something new—to take a new step in a new direction in the new year. The first chapter of Mark gives us the Gospel version of “Start.” It shows how the Jesus started his ministry. This series will encourage you to give it a try. To start.



Our passage today from the Gospel of Mark is short, it will go by fast—which is appropriate since the title of the sermon today is “Don’t Delay.” Our message is about time. As I read it, I want you to pick out the adverbial phrases. The what? I know, I had to ask my kids. Listen for the adverbs—the words that modify the verbs.

Pay attention to the timing of things. Notice how quickly things are moving in these moments. Listen to the Word of God that comes to us from Mark 1:16-20 (read passage).

What gets you to drop everything you are doing? What is it in your world that makes you set aside what’s in front of you and turn your attention to something else?

For example, when I see the phone number of my children’s school flash on my phone, that’s not a call I will wait to answer. The school only calls me if there is an urgent matter with my child, or an emergency. I will take that call right then. Or, when my husband or my mother call twice in a row with no space: that’s the signal there is something urgent I need to attend to right now.

What about you? What shoots to the top of your list—what will reorder your moment; what will capture your immediate attention? Perhaps a certain football team getting into the Super Bowl? What reorders everything in front of you at a moment’s notice?

In today’s passage, we see a remarkable and immediate response to the call of Jesus—an interruption that re-orders everything. Four young men, fishermen, shift their attention from, well... fishing, to respond to the invitation of a man who has simply said, “Follow me.”

We know the whole story of these young men, these disciples of Jesus, who they are and who they become. But their life of following Jesus had to start somewhere. At some point, they had to stop what they were doing and turn from their nets and begin something else. This story is their “start” moment. As John Ortberg so simply states in his widely read book, *If you Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat*, Simon, Andrew, James and John “got out of the boat.” To start something new, you got get out of the boat! Mark tells us it happened “at once.”

The word here translates immediately, at once, straightaway, and my favorite translation “without unnecessary zigzagging.” Mark uses this word 42 times in his Gospel. His narrative is full of energy, action and excitement. The King has entered his Kingdom. Life pours out wherever the King goes. A re-ordering of reality flows from his words and joy streams forth from all who meet him. Wherever the King goes, the creation is immediately responsive.

Who is this King? Who is this Jesus? Adam and I were talking about this passage earlier in the week, and he mentioned that for a grown man to be drawn

away from his work or his father is a big deal. I think that’s true. Let’s spend a few moments digging in. Who is this Jesus?

We read that Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee. He’s out and about. He’s really there. And as he walks he sees what’s around him. Last week at our ECO Gathering (that’s our denomination), Dr. Condaleeza Rice spoke to us about being Kingdom leaders. She commented that “Jesus walked the neighborhoods.” He walked so he could see. The text says “Jesus saw” Simon and Andrew. He “saw” James and John. The call of Jesus isn’t generic, abstract—spoken from on high to anyone who might be listening. The call of Jesus is particular. Jesus sees each person.

Mark doesn’t expand on this, but John does in his gospel. When Jesus saw Nathaniel, he said “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Nathaniel asked, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” (John 1: 47-48)

I see you, says Jesus. I see you. He knows you. He knows who you are, how you are put together (he made you), what brings you joy, what grieves you, what your circumstances are, where you are struggling, where you live, what your work is. Jesus sees you. He knows your name and address. When Jesus calls you to start something, he calls the real you. Right now. In this moment. He doesn’t call some abstract version of you, or ‘the you’ you wish you were. He sees you as you are and invites you to take a step out of the boat. How will you respond?

A week from Wednesday, we begin the season of Lent (Feb 14). It’s a season when many of us take some extra time to listen for the voice of Jesus. Like Advent, it is a holy and expectant time for the church. But interestingly, the majority of our life together is spent in a season referred to on the church calendar as “ordinary time.” It begins after Pentecost and ends with Advent (and in-between Advent and Ash Wednesday). We are in ordinary time right now.

Our passage today finds Jesus seeking out the four fishermen in the middle of an ordinary day. They are fishing. They are casting nets and preparing nets. This is their job. There is nothing especially sacred or set aside about this moment. Jesus simply interrupts their everyday, standard routine.

Jesus speaks in the middle of the day. Not just Sunday in worship, or during our Bible study group or our prayer times. But in a staff meeting, during a phone call with a client, playing with our kids, while studying for an exam, in the car, at the grocery store. The voice of Jesus comes in the midst of the ordinary, the mundane. And if we are alert, aware, responsive,

the call of Jesus changes everything. Jesus re-orders our lives. Everything we do becomes infused with Kingdom purposes.

In New Hampshire there is an InterVarsity retreat center where our college Christian Fellowship used to spend a lot of time. In the dining hall there is a wall set aside where you can pin up your college pennant. There were banners from colleges all over New England. The story is told of two college students who were looking at the wall where one of them, a Yale University Student, had just pinned up his college pennant. It was a proud moment as he showed his friend, who was from a neighboring college. His friend looked at the lovely Yale banner: For God, Country and Yale. He studied it a bit, hesitated for a moment before finally saying, "It's kind of anticlimactic, isn't it? I mean 3rd place is solid, don't get me wrong. But the Yale I know likes to be in first place." Most things in our life would like to be in first place.

But when God is first, everything else finds its proper place. The beauty of this moment in Mark's Gospel is that Jesus isn't calling these fishermen to become something utterly foreign to who they are. They are fishermen. He's not calling them to stop fishing. But when Jesus calls us to follow him, to put God at the top of the banner – everything we are, every gift we have been given, every assignment we complete, every college we attend is for the glory of God. Suddenly, I'm not just a Yale student, I've been sent to Yale by God to share the good news of Jesus.

Simon, Andrew, James and John are fishermen. Jesus isn't calling them to stop being fishermen, but to fish for something new – for people. Jesus intends to call every gift and skill you have to the very highest calling of all—bringing people into the Kingdom of God. Become who you really are. And start now.

You're a fisherman? I will send you out to fish for people. Teacher? I have sent you to teach people with patience, love and joy that they might see me. You're a mom? I have sent you to love, gather, carpool and feed people right alongside your own kids into the family of God. Lawyer? I have sent you to persuade people of the Love of God.

You get the picture. Is Jesus wanting you to start something right where you are? With the gifts you have and the people around you? Don't wait—life starts now. In this moment.

As we get ready for the Winter Olympics, we are hoping that our athletes are ready for their moment. They have worked so hard. They have tuned their training regiments to this one moment when they will leave everything on the floor. There won't be a second chance.

I was watching the men's figure skating the other night. And there was an outstanding performance by a

skater from Japan who did 4 quad jumps (which is the norm for winners today). On the first one he fell, but the rest of the performance was flawless. The commentator said, "I think it's fine that he fell, better here than in his Olympic moment. He needs to save every last perfect piece of this routine for the time when it counts." Nothing is more important. When our skaters take the ice in PyeongChang, the time has come.

When Jesus preaches his first sermon just this before this moment, he is communicating that "the moment has now arrived." The time has come! The King is bringing his kingdom." Nothing is more important than this time, this moment, today. Don't delay.

The writer of Hebrews clarifies this for us: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." The writer indicates that delay hardens our hearts. When we continually hear the voice of the Lord and don't respond, we eventually can become non-responsive, hard-hearted. We can easily talk ourselves out of responding to God's Word. Did we really hear the voice of God? I'll do it next week, or next month. Pretty soon we've forgotten, or convinced ourselves it wasn't really a call from Jesus.

So the exhortation from Hebrews is: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13). When you hear Jesus' voice, it's time to follow, to take that step, to get out of the boat. What's your "out of the boat step" today?

Last Sunday night at our Annual Meeting, we celebrated 5 generations of ministry in our congregation. One of the couples we celebrated was Jeff and Kathy Freyschlag, who oversaw our young adult Greenhouse ministry for 7 years—pouring their lives into young adults. 8 years ago Dr. Cliff Anderson cast a vision for this community house, and I asked Kathy to tell me more about what it looked like for her and Jeff to "step out of the boat." When she heard Cliff's vision and sensed the Spirit might be calling them to respond, what was her first step? What did she do? Other than thinking in her mind, "Good luck with that, Cliff." She prayed.

"As God brought it to mind, I prayed about it," she said, "and honestly, I hoped it would go away." But she found herself being drawn again and again into the vision. Eventually she talked to Jeff—and then to Cliff. And they took the plunge.

The first step for Jeff and Kathy wasn't to run out and buy a downtown fixer upper and get to work, although, they would eventually do just that. The first step for Kathy was prayer and then to talk to Jeff about it and eventually Cliff.

Sometimes we think of prayer as a passive activity. Prayer, however, is active engagement with God. Even

to pray for something to go away means you are engaging with the Lord. I love that was part of the process. There is a big difference between ignoring God and asking God to reconsider. One posture is passive and disengaged. One is active and fully engaged. Say something back to God!

Maybe you've heard Jesus calling you and your first step is a prayer to acknowledging that God is speaking to you. Maybe your next step is telling someone that you believe Jesus is asking you to start something. Engage. A first step gets you moving. And we all know Newton's first law of motion. "An object in motion stays in motion and an object at rest will never move." Get out of the boat, get moving. Start praying and start talking. Take that first step.

I close with this. As I've thought about my own life, and what helps me be responsive to God, what helps me live a "don't delay" life, I look at this little story in Scripture and I realize it's not complicated. Three words stand out.

"Jesus said," or Word—be in the Word of God. I am most responsive to God when I am regularly in the Word asking the Lord to guide me and lead me. In worship, I hear and receive the Word with you all. The Word of the Lord brings life and brings order to our steps. Are you in the Word?

Brother—God calls two pairs of brothers. We don't get out of the boat alone. God is calling others alongside, siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ—who is God calling with you? I need people (brothers and sisters) with whom to share my journey—to pray for me, to help me apply Scripture to my life and help me take risks. I am more responsive to the Lord when I am sharing my life with other Christians. Are you part of a small community? There will be some Life Groups starting up for Lent if you aren't yet part of one. We are not called to start something alone. Maybe your next step is toward community.

People—I need to be with people. This pushes me past my Christian community. I need to walk the neighborhood. When I'm isolated from people, I get confused about what's important, where people are, what they care about and struggle with. If Jesus is sending me to fish for people, I need to move in toward people—whether I'm out in my front yard, at my kid's school, at a Super Bowl party, serving in a place of mission—I need to be with people. Maybe your start has to do with "walking the neighborhood." It's a beautiful day—why not start today!

The time is now. Today. Jesus is pouring His life into this world—His hope, and healing, restoration and He wants you and me to be a part of it. Let's get moving...take a step...it's time to get out of the boat.

## STUDY GUIDE

### START • Mark 1:16-20

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage Mark 1:16-20. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.

- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- In our passage, we see these men respond to Jesus without delay. Why do you think they responded as they did?
- How do you tend to procrastinate in your life with Jesus? Why do we put off what God is calling us to start?
- Simon and Andrew leave their nets. James and John leave their father in the boat. If we are going to follow Jesus with urgency what might we have to leave behind?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

What does Jesus say to Simon and Andrew? What does it mean to fish for people? How are we called to fish for people?

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

Pray for us as a church. Pray that we would all follow Jesus with urgency and courageously join the Lord as He calls us to follow Him.