

Sermon: Silent Hope

New North Church, Hingham

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Based on **Psalm 62:5-12; Mark 1:14-20**

The revelation of Jesus' power and authority began at his baptism as he came up out of the water. It was evident in last week's call of Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43-51) and again in today's story of Jesus calling four fishermen.

Last week, Jesus 'decided to go' to Galilee, and today, he seems to have arrived.

As you can imagine, there is more to this reading than meets the ear.

You may recall that many people came from Jerusalem to be baptized by John, but Jesus was the only Galilean to do so, and now, after forty days of testing in the wilderness, back to Galilee he goes.

Here is where we are in Mark's narrative: John the Baptizer's ministry ended following his arrest, and he is never heard from again. And now in Galilee, at almost the same moment, Jesus began his ministry as previously announced by John in the wilderness in accordance with Scripture.

And the first thing he did was proclaim the *good news* of God.

We're only fourteen verses into Mark's story and, without having any further information, we can be forgiven for asking, *what* is the 'good news' of God?

Jesus himself tells us in the very next verse: in a time appointed by God, which is now fulfilled, God's Kingdom is at hand; it is imminent. It is still in the future but now very near, so close as to affect the present, and what we do today will affect tomorrow.

Believe in this, Jesus said; turn your life around and place your faith in God's good news. Put your all intellect, your trust, and your personal commitment into it.

These are the very first words Jesus speaks in Mark's Gospel, and he preached this everywhere he went in Galilee.

Then he came upon Simon and Andrew.

They apparently worked alone, casting their nets from the shore. Jesus spoke to them, and they immediately dropped everything and followed him. His promise was worth more to them than doing their difficult, smelly, most likely low-paying job.

James and John also dropped everything – including family – to follow Jesus. They seem to have a higher economic standing than Simon and Andrew, as their father Zebedee owns a boat and can afford to hire extra help.

Jesus *called* Simon and Andrew and *immediately* they left their nets.

Jesus *saw* James and John and *immediately* called them.

All four men left their old way of life behind without hesitation or reflection. They follow without having any knowledge of what Jesus is up to or what he plans to do. Something about this guy caused them to literally drop everything and follow.

We don't even know if any of them had ever heard about the good news of God. They responded only to Jesus and his authority to call them.

One moment, they were hard at work, not waiting around for anything but a good catch. Deep down inside, though, they must have each carried with them the silent hope for the salvation of better days ahead.

Who today would do what Simon and Andrew did? Perhaps anyone looking for a way out of a dead-end, low-paying job would. But who would do what James and John did, and leave their family behind?

It would have to be big to get any of us to drop everything to follow a stranger who offered nothing but a vague promise of a future vocation. No health care plan; no unemployment benefits; no 401(k); no mention of a regular paycheck. Would you?

Neither would I, at least not in the way described in Mark and John's Gospels. After getting whacked by God's 2x4, I finally followed my path. It took some time but here I am today. That's really how it goes for most people: you hear the call of the good news; you respond as you are able; you turn your life around to do it; and you follow after him as best you can according to your personal circumstances.

Psalm 62 ends by saying, "God, you repay to all according to their work." That can be unsettling. Would you rather have God treat you with the payment you deserve – also called justice – or with the *grace* that you *hope for* in Jesus Christ? Is our work merely a prelude or a holding pattern until that time when we respond to the good news?

God deals impartially and justly with us all, which helps us rely on God more than we rely on things like financial security, social standing, power, or personal achievements. Confidence in God helps us confront any difficulty, which says a lot, given the current state of the world.

The psalmist said to *trust* in the LORD rather than in riches acquired by violence or theft, or even in wealth acquired honestly, as it is often ephemeral.

Rather, the psalmist said, *know* that God is our refuge and our hope. Jesus said, *believe* in the good news. Belief here is not the same as believing in, for example, Santa Claus, or in something that is either true or false. It means to trust and rely on God, to be open to God, and to have hope and a deep longing for God's presence.

With that in mind, we recall that people in first-century Galilee and Judea were waiting and hoping for the return of the Messiah. Most people expected a Messiah who carried a sword; their hope was simply for an end to the oppression of Roman occupation.

Today, that kind of Messiah would need a lot more than a sword to deal with a world that is often hostile to the good news of God.

But Jesus is not that kind of Messiah. His arrival on the shore of the Sea of Galilee connected our silent hope with the reality of God's presence among us. Notice that all he required of those he called was to make a new beginning and to have a faith in and commitment to God. In return, we get a new identity as Christ followers, a new way of being, and a new purpose.

We don't follow Jesus because we hope he will wander by and call to us to follow him. We follow him because he has already called us. The time is fulfilled.

Amen.

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