

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Becoming a faithful Christian disciple takes both a **moment** and a **lifetime**.<sup>1</sup>

The moment is when we say yes to following Christ. The lifetime is the ongoing unfolding of learning, stumbling, misunderstanding, backsliding, and returning again to God.

In today's passage from Mark's Gospel we see the **moment** for Jesus' first disciples – Simon and Andrew, then James and John.

Mark's Gospel is our shortest, often jumping and breaking from one scene to the next abruptly. Here we have a story that gets to its point with very little action: Jesus simply encounters some fisherman and telling them to follow him into something new – and they did, immediately.

*Follow me* and *immediately* are in fact the words that used both times.

It was the work of a **moment** for these strangers to step into new life, to trade fishing for fish, for fishing for people.

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<sup>1</sup> Elton W. Brown, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*.

And so our story today ends. With the beginning of the beginning. But we know there's so much more to come as they learn this new way of life.

As Mark's Gospel unfolds we will see how this early decision needs to be reaffirmed and even corrected again and again. One biblical scholar lays it out this way:

At Caesarea Philippi, Simon will affirm his faith in Jesus, but not in Jesus as the suffering Messiah – that will take a lifetime (8:27-33).

On the mount of transfiguration Peter will know how good it is to be with Jesus, but will forget that the real task is to follow Jesus – for a lifetime (9:2-8).

In the courtyard, warming himself before the fire, Peter will threaten to give up a lifetime of fidelity for a moment of fear (14:66-72).

At the very end, when Jesus is on the cross, Peter, Andrew, James, and John will be nowhere to be found. Even then God will not count that moment as the final word: Jesus will go before them – for a lifetime (15:40-41; 16:7-8).<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is always both for now and for the long haul, both for a moment and a lifetime.

What this means for us is that we have to remember that just because we've been baptized, or we come to church, doesn't mean we're done.

Following Christ is an ongoing process of deepening our prayer life, continuing to learn, and always service to others.

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<sup>2</sup> Elton W. Brown, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*.

It is easy to stall in this endeavor. We can get comfortable with Jesus, think we know all the stories. What we're doing works, right? Why change and try something new? But when we slip into this way of thinking we close ourselves off to the new ways God seeks to reach us in our lives.

As martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero wrote, "A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed – what gospel is that?"<sup>3</sup>

Because those stories we know so well show us over and over again: even those whom Jesus called friends got it wrong over and over – thinking they knew him and what following him meant, only to learn they didn't really. If it was a lifetime for them, it will undoubtedly be so for us as well.

To pick up on the image of fishing from today's passage, fishing involves more than casting nets and pulling in the haul. Catching fish is the work of a moment, and also a lot of preparation.

There is a lot of work that has to go on behind the scenes continuously if you are going to successfully fish: mending nets, repairing tools that get damaged or worn out over time, keeping your boat in good repair, paying attention to the seasons and weather and other things that will affect your ability to cast out into open water.

Where are you in your life of faith? What is the work you need to be doing? How are you following Jesus moment by moment, day by day, year by year?

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<sup>3</sup> From *The Violence of Love* by Oscar Romero.

This year during Lent and Easter instead of a topical adult formation series, we will be participating with people all across the Episcopal Church in *The Good Book Club*. I'll share more information on what this will look like soon (because Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which is February 14<sup>th</sup> this year!). But the gist is that we will be immersing ourselves in reading and studying scripture – reading through the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (both books written by the same author and telling one long story) over the course of several months.

Maybe this is the opportunity you've been waiting for to engage God's Word more deeply, opening yourself to new revelation.

Or maybe there's something else you are interested in delving into. In the spring I will be launching a survey to see what kinds of formation programs you are interested in – topics, what times for gathering work best, whether you like one shot events – series – book groups – or on-going study of some kind. Please be thinking about what feeds you, or new things you want to learn more about.

My hope is that like those first drawn into community with Christ, we will answer the call to follow me without hesitation – and then spend the rest of our lives actively journeying with God.

~ AMEN ~