

## No Attachments

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 and Mark 1:14-20 † First United Methodist Church, Des Moines  
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Scholars believe Mark wrote his gospel in haste, as if he had little time to get it completed. The earliest version of the gospel we have, for example, ends abruptly in mid-sentence. There is also Mark's lavish use of the word "immediately" throughout the gospel; twice in the last three verses in this morning's reading. Mark uses the word immediately so often, it gives the feeling his story is hurtling along at an ever-increasing pace. It is easy to get caught up in the momentum of Mark's narrative as a result.

But when we stop for moment, interrupting Mark's accelerating narrative, and pay attention to specific moments in the narrative, we often see surprising things. Like Zebedee, father of James and John, left behind in a boat, surrounded by fishing nets, not all of them mended. Why was Zebedee left in his boat? Because Jesus had "immediately" called James and John, and they had just as immediately left their father in the boat and followed Jesus.

Couldn't they at least have waited until all the mending had been done? How did their mother find out about their decision? How did she feel about it?

Does "Follow me" mean "Follow me immediately. Follow me completely"?

Yes, as a matter of fact, it does.

Both Mark's gospel and Paul's advice to the Corinthians make that point. Jesus invitation, "Follow me," demands a response that must be a human being's top priority. Mark and Paul make it clear: if we wait until we are completely ready and all loose ends have been securely tied, we'll never follow. There will always be something else which needs doing first.

We'll never become disciples.

To free ourselves to follow Jesus as our Lord – our first priority – we have to let go of some attachments.

We tend to think of this kind of sacrifice more commonly among the many forms of Buddhism. In these schools of Buddhism, one cannot achieve enlightenment (*nirvana*) without shedding attachments to the desires and delights of the senses. A friend of mine gave me a cartoon poking fun at this approach. A modern Buddhist novice monk asks his teacher, "Master, is it permissible for a monk to use email?" To which the master replies, "Yes, as long as there are no attachments."

Paul urges the same approach to those in the church at Corinth which he started. Obviously, he expected human history was about to end, and that understanding of the immanent end of time shaped his advice. But his point stands out even from that context: we must pare away whatever holds us back from following Christ – everything that slows us down, hinders us, or blocks our readiness to serve Christ as Lord.

For Mark, the presence of Jesus means that “time is fulfilled” (pregnant with new possibilities), or, as he also puts it, “the kingdom of God has come near.”

And we must decide. Its time, as it were, to fish or to mend nets.

To follow Jesus, we must make being Christ’s servant our first priority. This was not new to Mark’s gospel. The psalmist says much the same in the 62<sup>nd</sup> Psalm: “Wait, my soul, silent for God, for God alone...” Only God can be our No. 1 priority, so when we get the invitation, “Follow me”, we need to decide, as Mark would say, immediately.

Thus, Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me” contains within it a question also asked by the old hymn we shall sing later in this service, “Are ye able?”

Are we able to make the choice to follow Jesus – letting go of all attachments which hinder us – and become his disciples **now**?

We can answer that question “Yes” more readily when we realize we don’t have to follow Jesus alone. We follow with others (as did Simon and Andrew, James and John). More importantly, we follow **with** Jesus, as they did. Jesus teaching them. Jesus showing them. Jesus eating with them. Jesus walking with them. Jesus promising never to leave them.

All because when they got Jesus’ invitation, they made the choice to let go of other attachments in order to attach themselves to Jesus; to God **alone** as the psalmist wrote.

I need to add that this choice does not necessarily cut us off from family and friends. Just a few verses after James and John leave their father forlorn in a boat, Jesus and the disciples make their way to the home of Simon’s mother-in-law, where they spend some time.

This choice to follow Jesus does ground all the relationships we have, all the choices we make, all of our life. To follow Jesus is to be a servant of Jesus. It is to be a disciple of Jesus, freed of all hindering attachments, to assist Jesus in the transformation of the world.

The kingdom of God has come near, and the time is fulfilled.

Are we able?

Are we ready to follow Jesus as Lord?

*In the name of the One God, Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.*