

Karen Hollis – Sermon
Mark 1:14-20
January 21, 2018

The Apostle Paul finds himself in prison a number of times in Acts of the Apostles. One of these times he is with Silas, singing hymns to God in the middle of the night, when there is a massive earthquake. The shaking threw open the doors of the prison and the chains off the prisoners. When the jailer woke to see everything undone, he drew his sword to take his own life before his angry superiors did it for him. Luckily Paul is watching him and shouts out in haste, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” The jailer brings lights into the cells and falls down before Paul and Silas, wondering, “What do they know that I don’t know? How are they content to stay in their cells when they could be free? Who is this God of theirs and what is this freedom they know while still in a jail cell?” He asks them, “What must I do to be saved from the chains that bind me to the Romans?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

The jailer, with the help of Paul and Silas, is able to look through what he can see with his eyes, to the Kingdom of God that lives folded within God’s creation. We live, just as the disciples and apostles did, in a beautifully holy world, created by God. Through our own hurt and pain, we forget who we are and try to control what we can see with our eyes. In our brokenness, we accept human systems and forget whose creation this is and who is really in control. It is only through fear that the jailer is bound to the tyranny of the Roman Empire. In the light of Christ and before the Kingdom of God, he finds wholeness, joy and freedom.

When Jesus comes on the scene in Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, he is speaking to people who know the same world under the empire, people living under the lie of human rule. The time has come, your waiting for freedom is over, the Kingdom of God has come near. The Kingdom of God, is like a treasure buried in a field – you might not find it unless you are awake and value it enough to look. The Kingdom of God is like leavening in 3 measures of flour – it is enough to lift and sustain everyone. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed – at first you can barely see it, but it soon grows fast and wild before your eyes, disturbing all that is contained and orderly.

Jesus comes proclaiming this message to change the lives of people imprisoned in their lives, but he can’t do it alone. This news is too big and too important for him to share it on his own, so in the Jewish tradition, he needs disciples who he can make to be like him. As we spoke about last week, it was pretty tough to become a Rabbi’s disciple – only the best of the best of the best were asked to follow a Rabbi and establish that life. Ordinary people would never have been given such distinction, but Jesus, being God with us, sees something extraordinary in everyone. He goes down to the lakeshore and finds Simon, Andrew, James and John working at the family business. When he honours them with an invitation to follow, they jump at the chance. A good friend of mine used to say, “I am so grateful for the first disciples! They are so dense; they never understand anything. If they struggled to understand about the Kingdom of God from Jesus, himself, I don’t feel so bad for my struggle to understand.” They were the first to say yes, the first to accept the joys and challenges of discipleship, the first to die to self and become one in Christ for the growth of the Kingdom.

We know now that Simon, who Jesus names Peter, the rock, becomes the leader of early Christianity. When Jesus says to him and his brother, “follow me and I will make you fish for people,” he made good on his promise. Actually, a better translation than the NRSV is, “follow me and I will make you fishers of people.” Jesus doesn’t cause us to *do* things differently, rather when we believe in and follow him, our very identity is changed. We stop *doing* things for the Kingdom

and *become* People Who work for and proclaim the Kingdom. We serve in the name of Jesus for justice, liberation, healing, creativity and possibilities.

We each possess unique gifts that are needed in the Kingdom of God, and gifts that are revealed to us and others as we are formed by our relationship with Christ. I was probably in my 2nd year of seminary when I got a call from a bone marrow centre saying I was a match to someone who needed a transplant. I was really surprised – when I went in to be added to the bone marrow database, I never imagined I would be a match for someone. At the same time I was really struggling with God’s call for me to be a leader in the church, in a public role. I realized as I went in for further matching with this anonymous patient, that there are unique parts of me – illustrated in my bone marrow – that are needed in the world. It is only by the grace of God that I am able to share them and serve in a public vocation. The bone marrow patient ultimately decided not to go any further with the transplant, but I was left with obedient humility in my walk with Christ. I will continue walking this path, God, because you call me.

Even if we’ve had a kind of lakeshore experience, it isn’t easy to be obedient. The parts of us that are attached to things in this world or places really struggle with saying yes to God. Sometimes we just want to pull the covers over our heads, stay in bed, and avoid God and the world. But the Kingdom is not concerned with our attachments to ideas, emotions or physical things. God says the work of the Kingdom is much greater than these. One might ask, is it worth it? It’s a valid question, though one that is clearly rooted in the earthly world. I would say, and you can tell me if you agree or disagree, the deep peace and communion with God that comes out of obedience will win out every time.

As I look at our congregation and Jesus’ call to us to follow, I think about the life cycle of churches. Usually they start with a dream, moving to belief in that dream, goal setting, structure, mission at the very top, followed by nostalgia, questioning, polarization and ending. The good and hard work you all have done over the past few years has brought you to the perfect place to hear this morning’s scripture. You have discerned through dreams, belief in those dreams, to goal setting and creation of a structure that was incredibly costly, and gave birth to a new congregation. Now we find ourselves at the peak, ready for our mission, in the perfect place of listening for Christ’s call to follow into the work of this church, here and now. We’re in this new season of listening for the voice of God in scripture, listening for God’s voice in prayer, in each other, in outside influences, for how we, Christ Church Gabriola, are being invited to follow Jesus. I hope you’re able to make one of the home gatherings, beginning this week, where I am hoping to hear from you all about where we are as a congregation . . . and this is a huge opportunity for us to listen to each other for the voice of God speaking in our midst. These questions are in the news for the next few weeks, so you don’t have to remember them after the sermon – you can reference them. *What are our greatest strengths, joys, and ministries as a congregation? What areas or ministries would you love to see improved, strengthened, or created? What do you feel are the top ministry priorities of an excellent Minister serving Christ Church Gabriola?* At the very least these questions will get us talking and listening to what is bubbling up in our midst, because as participants in the Kingdom of God, it is our job to listen for how we are being called to serve. So, in the spirit of obedience to God as participants and collaborators in the Kingdom of God, let us be in a season of listening for Jesus’ specific call to follow.