

“The Fierce Urgency of Now”

Mark 1:14-20

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January 21, 2024

From the Pulpit

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Thank you to all who make worship possible: our worship planners and leaders and staff members, our faithful deacons, our exceptional musicians, and our livestream ministry team behind the scenes. God certainly uses all of us to create worship to inspire and ground us as the people of God!

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Let us pray: O Ever-present and Ever-near God, come to us now through Your Word for us this day. And, O dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen. Amen.

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During this past month, our lectionary readings have taken us on quite the journey – together!

- It's hard to believe, isn't it, that it has almost been a month since we celebrated the wonder and the awe of the birth of the Christ Child?
- And since then, you may recall, we also have been inspired by the faithfulness of Anna and Simeon who patiently waited their *whole* lives for the coming of the Messiah.
- And then, the following Sunday, the magi modeled for us what it means to honor Christ by sharing the most precious gifts that they had.
- And last week, on Martin Luther King Sunday, Rev. Tim lifted up the mentor of Dr. King – the late Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman – someone who *still* implores **us** today, through his writing, to follow Jesus, with our *whole* being, that we might *truly live together* as one people!

And so, on this Sunday, I give thanks for this Biblical grounding that we already have been given as a congregation – at the beginning of this new calendar year *and* as we look ahead to the rest of this year – this year that promises to be a year of significant meaning and consequence across our nation as we prepare for the Presidential Election this fall – and also, here, within our congregation, as we prepare for later this year when Rev. Tim will retire after 25 years of faithful and impactful and spirited ministry, here, at First Church.

And so, it is at the beginning of this new calendar year **and** at this point in our lectionary cycle, that Scripture reminds us, once again, that God *always* gives us one to another as we seek to follow Jesus **while** we journey through the various seasons of our life together!

During these past couple of weeks, as I have been engaging with our text from the Gospel of Mark for this morning – **and** putting it into conversation with our broader context -- this theme of **PRESENCE** emerged for me -- both through our reading from Mark for today – as well as in the themes of Dr. King's preaching and teaching that we all have been reflecting on in recent weeks.

Our text for this morning is short and direct – just seven verses –which, by the way, is characteristic of the literary style of the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel writer of Mark had this way of getting right to point which reflects the sense of **urgency** that he brought to his writing as the *earliest* Gospel writer.

(It is believed that the Gospel of Mark was written somewhere between the years 65 and 73 C.E.)

And here, in our **brief** Gospel reading for this morning which is from the **very first** chapter of Mark, the word, **IMMEDIATELY**, is already used twice!

As an aside, the Biblical Greek word for the term, “immediately,” is “eutheos.” It is a term that’s used eighty-seven times in the New Testament although forty-two of those usages are in the book of Mark alone.

Clearly, Mark’s message for the people of God was critical and compelling, just as we find in our Gospel reading for today.

In our text this morning, Jesus said, “follow me” **and** it is written that Simon (who Jesus later renamed as Peter) and his brother, Andrew, *immediately* left their nets in order to follow Jesus.

And then, a couple of verses later, we learn that Jesus *immediately* also called James and his brother, John, both of whom also dropped their nets **and** even left their father, Zebedee, in order to follow Jesus.

And so, it is here – in this *very first* chapter of the *very first* Gospel that was recorded – that we find this sense of *immediacy* – and *urgency* – that comes with following Jesus *faithfully*.

Jesus did not mince words when he called his earliest disciples. Jesus’ plea was urgent when he said, **“Follow me. Follow me!”**

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It was in recent weeks – that I recognized, again, Jesus’ plea to follow Him – through the impassioned words of Dr. King’s well-known “I Have a Dream” speech – one of **the** most famous speeches in **history** which Dr. King delivered to over 250,000 people at the “1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.”

In this pivotal moment of the civil rights movement, Dr. King eloquently identified and described *that moment as the fierce urgency of now:*

“That very moment in our civil rights history is best understood as the fierce urgency of now!”

And later on in the speech, as you may recall, Dr. King emphasized that:

“It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of this moment.”

Indeed, there has always been an urgency for equal rights and racial justice throughout our nation and yet, justice has often been *denied or deferred*.

You may also recall Dr. King’s words that he wrote from the Birmingham Jail:
“Justice too long delayed is justice denied.”

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Dr. King’s words about *delayed* justice came to me in recent weeks when I learned about part of **our** civil rights history, right here, in Ohio. And sadly, it’s a story that is not well known ... although that will soon change!

The nonprofit organization called **Ohio Humanities** recently released a documentary called: *The Lincoln School Story: The Battle for School Integration in Ohio*.

It’s a 20-minute film that tells the truth about the history of segregated schools, here, in Ohio – and tells the story of the schools in the small town of Hillsboro which is not that far from Columbus. It’s about an hour south of here and is located halfway between Chillicothe and Cincinnati.

Through this film, which is referred to as the “Lincoln School Marchers,” we learn the poignant and painful and powerful story about the 55 Black mothers and their children who **courageously** took a stand *on a daily basis* from 1954 until 1956 ... which, by the way, their protest began long **before** the Montgomery Bus Boycott which started in December 1955.

After Brown versus the Board of Education was decided in 1954, the mothers and their children from the Lincoln Elementary School marched to and from a white-only school **every day** to demand inclusion of their children even though their children were turned away *everyday* and continued to be denied admission *for nearly two years*.

Almost ten years *before* Dr. King gave us that language about the “fierce urgency of now,” the Lincoln School mothers and children already knew what that meant ... because they lived it – day in and day out for twenty-one months – even though justice continued to be denied to their families on a daily basis.

The Lincoln School Marchers is one of the most powerful and inspiring films that I’ve seen in a long time. And I encourage all of you to watch it as well. (You’ll find it on the Ohio Humanities website, and is it’s expected to be shown on PBS later this year.)

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In our Gospel reading from Mark today, Jesus compels all of us – just like Peter and Andrew and James and John – **to drop our own nets of distraction and hesitation and complacency** – and to look within our own hearts – and to reevaluate our priorities – and to commit and recommit to following in the way of Jesus; that is, to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and to **truly** love and see and accept our neighbor as ourselves.

Thanks be to God, amen!

