

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 28, 2007

2nd Baptist Church, Lincoln, Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

Anticipation of Transformation

Exodus 17:1-7; Mark 1:14-20

Those young people who were with me at Camp Moses Merrill this summer at the Music and Drama Camp may remember that we used Mark for our Bible study. You may also remember that we called Mark a Gospel of action. He doesn't have Jesus sitting around just day-dreaming or doing nothing. He is always doing something. Like our heavenly Father, who is a God of action, so is Jesus. Like Father like Son, we can say.

Let's get the setting for this story in Mark. John has been arrested and put in prison. Prior to this he has been baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance (see verse 4). Many people have been coming out to hear him, the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him (verse 5). That includes those who became disciples of Jesus. Jesus also went out to hear him. Verse 9 tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee to hear John and to be baptized by him. It was at that moment, says Mark, in verses 10-11 that Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The other gospels who record this incident speak as if other people heard that same voice but Mark implies that this voice was intended only for the ears of Jesus. In other words Jesus received affirmation that he had a special relationship with God and a special mission to perform.

It is highly likely that Jesus and John were ministering together before John was put in prison but John's movement was the main one. When John was arrested it meant that the leader was gone. It is also highly likely that those who became Jesus' disciples were former disciples of John; or at least followed of him and were in sympathy with his message. Anyway, John is arrested; their leader is put out of action, and, later, as you know, beheaded by Herod Antipas.

So what's a guy to do? What about all those in Jerusalem and the countryside of Judea? What shall they do? They go back to their homes, their business; and get to work. Perhaps those who became Jesus' disciples had only been gone from their work for a short while just to hear this man John. Now there is no reason to stay away any longer. The movement that John started was finished so they go back home. Their hopes of any change, any transformation, that John preached about were shattered.

But Jesus has been tapped by God; he heard his voice saying, "You are my son whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Like Elisha in the Old Testament who picked up the mantle of Elijah and continued that ministry Jesus picks up the mantle of John and begins a proclamation in Galilee, for he had gone back to Galilee; "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

I notice something here. The first verse of Mark says, “The beginning of the gospel (or good news) about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Now, in verse 15, Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” Jesus proclaimed the good news of God whereas the first verse says something about the good news of Jesus, God’s anointed one (Christ), the Son of God. Jesus main concern was the good news of God. He did not proclaim the good news concerning him. If we are to be faithful to the message Jesus proclaimed we must not forget that he kept lifting up God as the one to listen to, the one to look to, and the one to follow, the one to glorify; just as he did.

That’s what these people who went out from Jerusalem and all the countryside wanted to hear. They wanted a word from God! God could transform their lives, their country, and their situation. Now with John arrested that hope of transformation was gone.

Along comes Jesus, picking up the mantle that John had had dropped. He proclaims the good news of God; that his kingdom is near. People are hearing this and their hopes are being renewed. They were not yet going out to hear Jesus as they did John but they will soon. Jesus was going to them. He went throughout Galilee, the place where Nazareth was, where he grew up, and preaching this good news.

One day he is walking beside the Sea of Galilee. He recognizes Simon and his brother, Andrew fishing. They could have seen Jesus when they were listening to John’s preaching, perhaps they had seen him baptized. Perhaps they heard John say, in verse 7 and 8, “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Jesus issues an invitation to them, “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” What a strange invitation. Their gifts were in their occupation of fishing. Could they be open to a reinterpretation of those gifts so that Jesus could call them into discipleship? Evidently they thought so for at once they left their nets and followed Jesus.

Going on a little further they come across James and John with their father Zebedee. Their fishing operation is a little bigger than Simon and Andrew for they have boats and hired men. Simon and Andrew have a net that they throw into the lake and drag it in.

I saw a pastor talking with children. He was talking about fishing and demonstrating how to cast a line with a fishing rod. He knew what he was talking about because he would demonstrate how to throw the line just about any place he wanted to. But then he said that the disciples did not use a fishing rod like he was using. They had a net which they threw out from the shore or a boat and it would drop down in the water because of weights on one edge of the net and floats on the other edge. Then they would pull the net in to the shore or the boat and in it would be whatever was in the water. The pastor picked up

something that looked like loosely folded netting that he had brought with him, gave it a slight toss to one side and it opened up and settled on the floor. He said that a person who knew how to throw this net could make it cover a wide area, catching many fish and other creatures in the water. After they pulled it in they would separate the fish from the creatures they did not want, keep the fish and throw the rest back into the water. Not only the children but all of us were able to get an idea of how the disciples fished.

So Andrew and Simon may have not been as well to do as James and John. But that did not make any difference to Jesus. He could use all levels of society if they desired to follow him. And James and John also follow leaving behind a possible lucrative fishing business with their father and the hired men.

So why did these men suddenly decide to follow Jesus? I like to think it was because they wanted something better for their lives and for their people. When they heard John, and were possibly baptized by him, they envisioned a transformation. With John in prison that vision was gone. Along comes Jesus whom they kind of know because of what they have already experienced. He seems to be picking up the movement John started and going forward, proclaiming the Kingdom of God is near. Their anticipation of transformation is renewed and so they follow him.

Neema Cyrus-Franklin in a devotional that Fayette and I read last Thursday wrote on this theme. She said: “Although I didn’t realize it at the time, I participated on the high school track team because I wanted to be a part of something greater than myself. Similarly, the disciples wanted to be a part of something greater than themselves—the kingdom of God. “My experience running in track meets transformed me. It taught me, even though we didn’t always win our race or compete as well as we could have, to keep on running and not to stop. Jesus is like our coach, standing on the sideline encouraging us to keep on running the race.” (*These Days*, October 25, 2007)

“The disciples wanted to be a part of something greater than themselves—the kingdom of God.”

We too, want to be a part of something greater than ourselves—the kingdom of God. The call of Jesus invites us to become a part of something greater than ourselves.

God is calling us as a church to be part of something greater than ourselves. We can be transformed as we follow him. Like the disciples we can anticipate transformation.

I think of the caterpillar crawling on the ground. It isn’t always going to be a caterpillar, one of these days it is going to be a beautiful butterfly. I wonder if it knows that. I wonder if it is in anticipation of a transformation.

We don't know if the caterpillar can think like that, be in anticipation, but I know that we can. In this in-between time, this time of transition, we can be in anticipation of the future. We can be in anticipation of transformation.

Furthermore we know who transforms us. It is Jesus and he calls us to follow him. It is in following; it is in obedience to God that transformation takes place.

Does Jesus call disciples today as he did these first disciples? In my own life I know that he calls, again and again. Do I follow? I try to but I'm sure that there are many times that I do not even hear his call. I ask for his forgiveness and pray that he will try me again.

And I believe that he calls you also. He calls you to new life in God through Jesus Christ. He calls you to take the gifts you have and redirect them in new ways.

Is he calling today? Yes, he is. I invite you to come forward and pray with me about this call or about a call, as we sing "A Mighty Fortress is our God" (# 26). Maybe you have been attending this church and God is calling you to become a member. I invite you to come and make it known as we sing.

We are in anticipation that God is calling us to transformation. Like the caterpillar we may not know what it is but we will recognize it when it comes. Come, let us pray together. Let us renew our pledge to be his students.

Benediction: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we all can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, for ever and ever. Amen!