

Prayer: May this morning's message bring us a better understanding of the gospel of Mark and his proclaiming to the world that Jesus Christ was the son of God. Thank you for this wonderful gift. Amen

I'm very happy to be with you today. It's a little intimidating I have to say but bear with me while I talk about St. Mark for a minute or two. I mean, who is Mark anyway. As always there are many theories about him but the most prevalent one is that although he was not a disciple, he hung out a lot with Peter as most of his stories relate directly to Peter's experiences while following Jesus. It is also agreed that he is the John Mark mentioned in Acts 12:12 and it was his mother, Mary's, house that Peter came to when he was miraculously released from prison after Agrippa had him arrested around 41 or 42 A.D. In fact, I read in one book that during an excavation under the church of St. Mark in Jerusalem an inscription was found on the old foundation.

This old writing claims the original church was built on the foundation of Mark and Mary's house and that their house was the place of the Upper Room and the site of the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit. If this is true, St. Mark had a very rich life indeed.

We know he accompanied Paul and his cousin Barnabas, on their first mission trip to Antioch but he later separated from Paul and returned to Jerusalem instead of continuing with Paul on his journeys.

He did redeem himself however as he was with Paul at the end in Rome. In fact he was still there when Peter was martyred too. In that same year, 64 A.D., there was a devastating fire that destroyed more than half of Rome. It was strongly believed at the time that Nero set the fire himself and then blamed the Christians for it. This began the massive persecutions against them. So, the theory is that Mark wrote his gospel to help his fellow Christians remain faithful during this time of crisis. After the deaths of Paul and Peter, Mark traveled to Alexandria where he was eventually martyred in 68 A.D.

So, Mark begins his gospel by writing— It's the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Now I'm hoping to set the stage for right before Jesus calls to Peter and his brother Andrew.

Let's imagine for a moment that we are back in the time of Jesus, about 2000 years ago. There was no newspapers, telephones, ipods or computers so everything was known only by word of mouth. The buzz around town was that something miraculous was happening. Some guy called John the Baptist was preaching near the Jordan River. It seemed like everyone was making the 20 mile trek from Jerusalem just to hear John talk about the coming of the Messiah and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin.

Word spread around the land like hotcakes. Imagine the gossip! Have you heard about John the Baptist?

He says he is not the Messiah or Elijah but is preaching and baptizing as repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He says the Messiah is coming! Can you believe it? This is so exciting.

Now, imagine the crowds that must have surrounded John while he preached God's word and spoke of the one who was coming. Then imagine seeing a man come forward and hear John proclaim – and this is from John 1:29, Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We don't know if all who were there saw the heavens part and the spirit of the Lord appear as a dove saying "You are my son, the Beloved. With you I am most pleased" but I hope they did.

We don't know much about the time after those 40 days following His baptism but word of Jesus must have spread around the country like wildfire. We do know that after John was arrested, Jesus began preaching around Galilee saying "The time is now and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News." And we don't know how long he had been preaching before he called out to Peter and his brother Andrew.

Now we come to the sticking point of the story. Imagine you were going about your daily business and without any warning, Jesus appears before you.

He calls saying, “Follow Me. Throw down your nets and become fishers of men!” Would you go? Would you leave your friends and family and your livelihood to follow this man? Mark tells us that Peter and Andrew immediately threw down their nets and did just that. And when Jesus came to James and John, they did the same thing. And as they say, the rest is history.

I think we all have some idea what it must have been like for these men. Imagine being so completely inspired by someone and filled with so much love that they gave up everything they knew to be with him. The power of his presence must have been amazing.

Have you ever believed in something so much that nothing on earth could ever change the way you felt? Have you ever had the urge to do something so dramatic that it could change your life forever? Could that be Jesus calling? Did you hear him?

So fast forward. Here we are today – children growing up surrounded by friends and family and adults immersed in our jobs, our activities, our families. We have houses, condos, apartments, bills to pay, obligations and

responsibilities. Could we be able to give up everything we have worked so hard for to follow Jesus?

Thankfully times have changed. We can without giving everything up like those first 4 disciples but we know it isn't always easy to hear his call. Sometimes we are so immersed in our busyness we just can't hear him. We're also bombarded daily by the problems and challenges of our world. Poverty, disease, endless wars, not to mention social and economic injustice and the harm we're doing to our environment. I don't know about you, but I feel totally overwhelmed by all this. What can we do? I don't know the answers. I wish I did.

I have to believe that in time, all things will become clear. While all these things have been in the world since humanity began, what seems to be missing now is the call from St. Mark to believe in the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ and open our hearts to love.

Can you imagine a world where love for people and earth were more important than wars and money? Can we even think about a world where there is no greed or violence?

Jesus gave one lasting instruction to his disciples: love one another as I have loved you. That's the call we need to follow. It's the mantra that keeps me steady when I find myself envious of others or angry about all the horrors in the world or when I'm just too sad. Just Love. My hero is Mother Theresa who says she sees the face of Jesus in everyone she meets. Now that's the kind of love I'm talking about. With enough love, anything is possible.

The list of things that break our hearts can go on and on. But here is the simple truth. We are always being called to open our hearts to love – can you hear Him?

He doesn't want us to dwell on things we can not change. He only wants us to be open to the love He shares with us and do what we know in our hearts in the right thing to do. Through answering this call, we can find more kindness and compassion in ourselves so we can pay it forward. It's the only way I can think of to make a positive change in the world, and we can do this through love - just one smile or a helping hand at a time.

In Him lies our hope – no matter what we do or who we work for or where we live. In his sight, we are all the same. Jesus has lived among us; He knows what's in our hearts and is always calling out to help us – He was sent by God to teach us to love one and other as he loves us. To be with us in our struggles and to celebrates our joys. To whisper our names when we stumble and to carry us forward when we can't quite get there on our own. Like the disciples before us, we are called to open our hearts and follow him. His unconditional love is always calling. Can you hear him?

Come to me, lay down your heavy burdens and follow me. Love one another as I love you. Yes, it's Jesus calling – can you hear him now? Amen