

Mark 1:14-20
Follow Me!
Rev. Marci Scott-Weis

Friends, in today's scripture, we continue our journey into the Gospel of Mark with the start of his ministry. So far in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been baptized and faced the temptations in the wilderness. He was blessed by God and called Beloved and he was tested and tempted and now, now the work of his ministry begins.

In our text today, something has happened that calls Jesus out and into the world. And that something is that John the Baptist has been arrested. John who baptized Jesus. John who was probably a mentor for Jesus, John the Baptist has been arrested. And so, Jesus comes to Galilee preaching that the kingdom of God draws near.

And as he begins this work, this public ministry of preaching the kingdom of God, he gathers close to him those who will walk him, his disciples. He goes to the Sea of Galilee and he sees Simon and Andrew fishing and he invites them to follow him. He does this again with James and John. These men leave their nets and follow Jesus. He says to them 'follow me and fish for people' and they follow.

I've thought a lot about that story throughout this week. And what a week it has been for us all. History was made in the peaceful transition of presidential power in our country, something that seemed potentially not possible at this time last week. And it was because of my own worries and concerns at the beginning of this week, that I struggled to pull this sermon together. See, I'm a sermon writer who always starts my sermons on Sunday afternoons with research and then I always write my sermons on Mondays and then spend Tuesday making changes, tinkering with words.

Well not this week. The first half of this week I found myself filled with worry for the safety of those in our nation's capital and worry about all that could possibly go wrong on Wednesday. And so, I struggled to make sense of Mark's story of Jesus calling the disciples while carrying these greater worries for our country. As this week's events unfolded, I carried this story, this story of Jesus calling his disciples, saying, follow me. Follow me.

On Tuesday afternoon here on the west coast, our congregation gathered with churches across our nation to ring our bell in honor of the over 400,000 lives lost to COVID. As I watched the nationwide COVID Memorial Service at the Lincoln Memorial on Tuesday night, I heard the words offered by Cardinal Wilton Gregory who said, '*our* sorrow unites us to one another as a single people with compassionate hearts.' And I thought of being united in sorrow and in compassion and I remembered this story and Jesus saying, 'follow me'.

On Wednesday morning prior to the presidential inauguration, I listened to the sermon offered to Mr. Biden as he attended mass before his inauguration. The Rev. Kevin O'Brien had these words to say, 'After too much darkness, the dawn breaks today.... Let us meet the dawn together, brothers and sisters,

emboldened by our faith and civic conviction, full of promise and hope.’ And I thought of joining together to meet the dawn and I remembered this story of Jesus saying, ‘follow me’.

After President Biden had taken the oath of office, in his first speech as president, he issued a call for unity and healing. I heard his words saying ‘My whole soul is in it today, on this January day. My whole soul is in this. . . With unity we can do great things, important things.’ And these words ‘here's the thing about life. There's no accounting for what fate will deal you. Some days you need a hand. There are other days when we're called to lend a hand. That's how it has to be, that's what we do for one another.’ I heard those words from our President and those calls for healing and unity, for compassion and caretaking and I remembered Jesus saying, ‘follow me’.

But above all of those words and calls, one rang the loudest for me from the events of last week. And that was from the words of 22-year-old poet laureate Amanda Gorman. A woman who like President Biden had a speech impediment as a child. A Harvard graduate, the first person to be named national youth poet laureate, Gorman has shared that her speech impediment was a primary reason that she was drawn to poetry at a young age. She wrote her first poem at the age of four.

It was her words, Amanda Gorman’s words that have sat with me the most out of the events of this past week and if you haven’t had a chance to hear her recite her poem, ‘The Hill We Climb’, I really encourage you to do so and I’ve included a copy of the poem in today’s MailChimp as well as a link to her reciting that poem on Wednesday.

In the amazing poem ‘The Hill We Climb’ that this young woman recited on the Capital steps this week, Amanda Gorman opens by acknowledging that finding hope can be challenging, she asked "Where can we find light in this never-ending shade, the loss we carry, a sea we must wade?" I heard her words of hopelessness and doubt and I thought back to those words from Jesus, follow me, follow me.

And she went on . . . "Even as we grieved, we grew . . . even as we grieved, we grew.’ In her call to both acknowledge pain and to find meaning and growth from it, I thought back to those words from Jesus, follow me, follow me.

Ms. Gorman recited, ‘We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another. We seek harm to none and harmony for all . . . With every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one . . . We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful.’ I heard those powerful words of promise and transformation and I thought back to the story of Jesus on the lakeshore and his invitation, follow me.

Ms. Gorman closed her poem with these words, "When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it." I’ve meditated and prayed on those words a lot this past week,

that image of there being enough light in the world if and only if we are brave enough to both see it and BE it and I have imagined Jesus saying to those disciples, follow me, follow me.

In our scripture today, Jesus meets the future disciples where they are at, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And it was on that shoreline that Mark tells us Jesus came and saw and invited. He initiated and he invited them to become fishers for people. Jesus met these future disciples where they were at, both figuratively and literally. And he invited them to follow him.

And we know that they do, they do indeed follow him throughout his ministry and on the road to Jerusalem and almost right up to the cross. They follow him. Barbara Brown Taylor refers to this episode of calling the disciples in Mark as the ‘miracle on the beach’. These men who hear Jesus’ call and immediately leave everything behind and follow him simply because he invites them.

Mark’s story of the call of the disciples lacks a whole lot of details. But what is clear is that Jesus went to them, these future disciples and he sought them out, he invited them to join with him and fish for people. And in that simplicity of story, we can find a connection to today, to our contemporary times, to the words shared at this week’s historic events in our country.

Jesus calls, he invites, he creates something new and we are invited along that journey as well. He meets us where we are at, in the messy daily grind of our lives. He meets us in our families, in our homes, in our relationships, in our work, in our love and in our struggles. He meets us where we are at.

And he says to all, ‘follow me’. And maybe unlike those disciples long ago, we have to pause and ask, ‘to what end, why accept the invitation to follow? What does it mean to be fishers of people?’ I read the stories of Jesus ministry and his life and his death and his resurrection and I answer those questions this way. We follow Jesus to seek justice. We follow him to welcome and call all into God’s open and loving arms. We follow him to shower forgiveness and to create transformation. We follow him to walk with each other and support each other along the way. To paraphrase Amanda Gorman and draw inspiration from her words, we follow him to find the courage to BE the light as new dawn blooms. We follow him to be brave enough to step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid.

We follow Jesus to love.

This simple story of call invites us to follow Jesus and do that great work of love in this world.

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

To BE the light as new dawn blooms. For ourselves, for each other, for our families, for our communities and for our nation

In the coming days, may we each find a way to answer that call.

May we as individuals and families and communities and a nation and a world find a way to accept that invitation to create something new, to be something more, to move towards love and justice and peace.

As Amanda Gorman encourages us to do, 'step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid' and to free the blooming of the new dawn and most importantly be brave enough to see and to BE the light for our world.

May we hear that invitation, and may we follow where it leads us.

May it be so

Amen.