Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(May 15, 2011) Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

"24"

Study #2

(Mark 1:14-39)

Introduction: So, what have I gotten myself into now...?

Have you ever started something and then wondered - very quickly! - "What in the world have I gotten myself into this time?"

I have wondered if elected officials ask themselves that question after a successful run for office.

"There I was, taking care of my family, running a business. Everything was going great. Then, I get this wild-hair idea of public service. Now, I'm a Senator/Judge/ Mayor. My time will not be my own. I'll have no privacy. The pay ain't all that great. What have I gotten myself into?"

That question might be asked by people who leave one job to do another, more demanding job; by people who decide to take on a rigorous exercise program; people who decide on elective surgery; maybe even by people who decide to follow Jesus...

Today, we wonder if that thought might have occurred to four men, twenty four hours into their career as Jesus followers.

As we saw last Sunday, the beginning of Mark's Gospel shows John the Baptist preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah by baptizing as a way to call the people of Israel to repentance and holiness. We saw John baptize the Messiah - Jesus! - to the accompaniment of the heavens opening, the Spirit descending as a dove, and the voice of God booming, "I'm pleased with You, Son!"

Then, Jesus was led by the Spirit away from the Jordan River out into the wilderness of Judea to be tempted by Satan and to be surrounded by wild beasts.

Following those forty days in the wilderness, Jesus returned to His Galilean home. Very shortly after His return, He was propelled into His very public ministry. Mark tells us what prompted Him to go public.

The Launch of Jesus' Ministry (vv. 14-15)

The Arrest of John the Baptist (v. 14a)

[14a] Now after John had been taken into custody¹...

We'll read the fuller story of John's arrest and martyrdom later in Mark's Gospel (chapter 6), but for now, it is stated as a simple fact.

We are left to accept that John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, was arrested (for what crime? by whom? We aren't told here!)

When Jesus heard of Johns' arrest, He knew it was time and He moved into action.

Jesus Goes Public (vv. 14-15)

[14] Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God [15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

¹ The word for John's arrest is the same word used later to describe Jesus' arrest. Often means "betrayed."

² "Galilee" is a rather imprecise designation. Mostly what is in view is the area north of Judea and it may include the regions of Decapolis and Phoenicia.

The period of the forerunner is now over. John has faded to the background and the time of Jesus the Messiah has begun.

His essential message is: "It's time. I'm here. The Kingdom of God is now. Keep preparing yourself for the Kingdom as John told you to do-repent! - and believe the unbelievably good news that I'm bringing."

Mark tells us that He entered Galilee. By moving into Galilee, Jesus went to where the people were.

Because of the fish-rich waters of the Sea of Galilee, the region surrounding it was rich with people living in fishing villages and small towns and larger cities.

For our first glimpse of Jesus, post-temptation, we look to the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus Calls: "Follow Me" (vv. 16-20)

Jesus "Trolls" for Fishermen (v. 16a)

[16a] As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee...

Also known as the Lake of Gennesaret and the Sea of Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee (which is how Mark always refers to it), is really not much of a "sea"

It is a good-sized freshwater inland lake. It is about thirteen miles in length and eight miles across at its widest point, making it larger - but not by much - than Canyon Lake.

The Sea is fed by underground springs and by the Jordan River, which flows into it from the north and out of it down to the lowest inland lake in the world, the saltwater Dead Sea.

The waters of the Sea of Galilee and the area around it are the places of much of the activity in Mark's Gospel.

One morning, Jesus takes a morning stroll on a beach on the northwest side of the Sea.

This is not an aimless stroll. Jesus is purposeful. This is the Master Fisherman trolling. But He's not trolling for fish. He's trolling for fishermen.

Jesus' Catches 'o the Day (vv. 16-20)

Simon and Andrew (vv. 16-18)

Fishermen at work (v. 16)

[16] As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon,³ casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.

We'll later know Simon as "Peter." For now, he's just Simon. He and his brother Andrew were fishing with a net, a heavy, circular net. It was about ten to fifteen feet in diameter and was weighted at the sides to sink and so trap fish. With the fish trapped in the net, Simon and Andrew would haul it back to shore, empty out the fish - and do it all over again.

This kind of fishing is backbreaking labor. On this morning, the brothers were fishing from the shore. They weren't out in a boat.

We can imagine Jesus looking at these two guys, sizing them up. As He draws near to where they are, He speaks to them.

The Master Fisherman (v. 17)

[17] And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Mark doesn't indicate that Jesus knew them prior to calling them to follow. It is likely that the brothers did at least know Jesus as a rabbi living in the area. And He likely had some acquaintance with them.

They also would have known that it was common for a rabbi to have disciples following after him. Perfectly natural that Rabbi Yeshua ben Joseph would have disciples.

³ John tells us that Simon and Andrew came from Bethsaida, across the north end of the lake.

However, Jesus' approach to them would have thrown them both for a loop.

Rabbis in the first century NEVER approached potential disciples and challenged them to follow. It was ALWAYS the other way around. Disciples would choose which rabbi they wanted to follow and would request the privilege of being mentored by that rabbi.

Jesus' approach to Simon and Andrew broke the mold of what was accepted practice for a rabbi. He chose them. He approached them. He invited them to follow Him.⁴

His invitation was unusual, though, for more than the unusual nature of the approach. His invitation came with a promise. "Guys, up until now you've been fishing for fish. Follow Me and you'll be catching men."⁵

To record the brothers' response, Mark gives us another "immediately."

Following (v. 18)

[18] Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

There is no hesitation. They brought their nets to the shore and began following Jesus. Just like that.

Did they know what they were getting themselves into? Nope. Did they know much about Jesus? Probably not.

But there was something tantalizing, something mouth-watering about His invitation and the promise that came with it. They couldn't pass up the opportunity to "fish for men" - whatever that might mean.

⁴ It is more of an Elijah/Elisha relationship where the leader calls the follower. (1 Kings 19:19-21) Thus, Jesus' summons of the brothers marks Him out as a prophet (and more than a prophet) rather than as a rabbi.

So, the first act of Jesus' mission was to call a set of brothers to follow Him. That mission accomplished, He kept on walking down the beach, now accompanied by Simon and Andrew.

James and John (vv. 19-20)

Fishermen at work (v. 19)

[19] Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets.

Here is another set of brothers. They are fishermen, but they aren't fishing. They are repairing their nets after a hard night of fishing, preparing for another hard night of fishing to come.

For professional fishermen, fishing was a full-time gig. If they weren't fishing, they were fixing nets. If they weren't fixing nets, they were taking fish to market. Their lives revolved around the world of fish.

As soon as Jesus got within earshot, He called them, too!

The Master Fisherman (v. 20a)

[20a] Immediately He called them...

Even though it is not in the text, I think we can safely assume that He issued the same promise to James and John that He had given to Simon and Andrew.

He offered them the chance to become fishers of men, and their response was every bit as decisive as the other brothers' had been.

Following (v. 20b)

[20b]...and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

The words here give us a sense for the size of the boat. It's not a fishing boat with a ten horsepower Evinrude outboard motor.

⁵ In the Old Testament, it is God who is the fisher of men, and usually ominously so - related to judgment. For "fishers of men" see Jeremiah 16:16 where the Lord is going to send "fishers" (i.e. - the Babylonians) to judge His people, Israel. But the image here (Mark 1) is that of rescuing people from judgment rather than catching them for judgment.

It was a working man's boat, with enough room for Zebedee, his two sons plus servants.⁶

And can you imagine the look on Zebedee's face? "What in the world? Where are you boys going off to now? And what do you think you're doing, leaving me with all this work?!"

Or maybe he's proud to see his sons following a up and coming young rabbi like Jesus. We don't know what was going on in the father's mind. But Mark clearly wants us to picture a break from life as James and John had known it.

The moment they began to follow Jesus, everything changed. Following Jesus took precedence over family and livelihood.⁷

So, in the space of a morning's walk on the beach, Jesus has collected four fishermen. Over the course of three year's time, He will transform them into something they are not now. They will become fishers of men.

Now, let's think for a minute about the spiritual condition of these four as they continue walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

About following Jesus...

Did Simon and Andrew and James and John believe in Jesus at this point? Had they placed their trust in Jesus for eternal life? It is certainly possible, but we are not told.

We are told that they followed Jesus. So, does "following" equal "believing"? Is "following Jesus" what defines someone who is saved (i.e. - has eternal life/is born again).

No, the New Testament is too clear in too many places that following does NOT define the child of God. It is FAITH that saves, not following.

Now, should someone who has believed in Jesus follow Jesus? Of course! That is the life of discipleship, and it is the life to which every child of God is called.

(Exhibit A: Jesus and every New Testament author consistently calls believers to be wholly devoted to Him.)

Conversely, do some people follow Jesus who are not saved? Absolutely.

(Exhibit A: Judas Iscariot, who is referred to as a "disciple" throughout the Gospels, followed Jesus. Many people today follow Jesus who have not believed in Him for salvation.).

Now here's a tough one. Do some saved people NOT follow Jesus? Sadly, Yes.

(Exhibit A: The dozens of New Testament commands to genuine believers to STOP committing certain sins.).

What I am trying to show here is that there is a distinction between following Jesus, learning about Jesus, even obeying Jesus' commands AND receiving the free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

As of Mark 1:20, it isn't clear whether the four fishermen are saved.

We don't know if they have faith in Jesus to save, or if they think it's cool to follow a rabbi and are intrigued with the idea of fishing for men.

Maybe they have a mustard seed's worth of faith in Jesus - which is certainly sufficient to save. Maybe they have more than that. Maybe not even that.

What we do know is that they are following Him, just as most people follow at some level - learning about Him, discovering truth about Him - prior to taking that defining step to place faith in Jesus for salvation.

⁶ In John 21, we read about the boat the disciples were in that was hauling a net filled with so many fish that they couldn't bring it in to the boat, this due to Jesus' miraculous power. That boat was large enough to contain a "little boat" in which the disciples rowed to shore with the great catch. Big boat.

⁷ In point of fact, Simon and the rest did keep control of at least one boat, as is evident from many stories included in Mark.

Maybe you are following Jesus today - but have not yet come to the point of placing your faith in Him for salvation. You're learning about Him. You're exploring the Christian faith. You're even taking some steps toward obedience.

Great! Keep following.

And there will come a day (maybe today, or tomorrow or next month) when you will see the reasonableness of placing the weight of your faith in this Jesus you have been following, and you will trust Him with your eternal soul for the forgiveness of your sin.

And what do you do after that? You keep on following!

The four fishermen have little idea about what they have gotten themselves into. But, they are about to find out that following Jesus is about more than going to class and sitting through lectures and taking exams through the course of a semester.

The school of discipleship they have just entered is a rigorous academy and the classroom is called "life."

You may remember the television show with Jack (Kiefer Southerland) Bauer, "24". We who watched (from time to time) were always amazed at how much stuff could be crammed into one twenty four hour time frame. It took an entire season to unpack that "Day's events.

In the remainder of our time together today, we'll see what an amazing amount of life can be crammed into one day's worth of following Jesus.

The group of Jesus and His four disciples move from the beach to the nearby beachfront city of Capernaum.

First Tastes of Followership (vv. 21-39)

In the Synagogue (vv. 21-28)

Teaching in the synagogue (vv. 21-22)

Capernaum (v. 21a)

[21a] They went into Capernaum...

There were lots of fishing villages, many of them situated on the northwest shores, and Capernaum was one of the more prominent ones.⁸

Jesus chose Capernaum as the central base for His ministry operations. Having been raised in Nazareth, He set up shop as an adult in Capernaum, a city of some ten thousand residents.

On the morning of the Sabbath, He and his followers did what all God-fearing Jews did. They went to the Jewish synagogue to worship.

The synagogue setting (v. 21)

[21] They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and He began to teach

Based on some ruins that archaeologists have discovered in Capernaum, we have reason to believe that this was a pretty large synagogue - a mega-synagogue? - holding perhaps hundreds of people.

And, since the right to teach in a synagogue was one tightly held by the synagogue leaders, we'll assume that Jesus had been invited to speak on this Sabbath.⁹

The effect of His teaching was exactly what we would expect from the Messiah.

⁸ A significant lakeside settlement. Capernaum had a detachment of Roman troops, a customs post, and a resident official.

⁹ That Jesus was teaching on this Sabbath indicates that He was already well known and had been active long enough to be respected and invited to teach.

Jesus, teaching (v. 22)

[22] They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.¹⁰

I wish we knew what He had been teaching on that day. We don't know, of course. But whatever it was, it was sufficiently provocative to elicit amazement.

Now, to their credit, the scribes didn't try to teach with authority. That's because, well, they didn't HAVE authority. As they taught, their task was to affirm the authority of God (that's MY task, too, by the way).

But when Jesus taught He wasn't simply affirming the authority of the Word of God. He WAS the living Word of God. He had authority, intrinsic authority.

So, the amazement from the crowd seems to me to be less about WHAT He was teaching and more about HOW He was teaching.

While teaching, right in the middle of what I'm sure was a messianically brilliant point, Jesus was interrupted by a spiritually-insensitive demon.

Drama in the synagogue (vv. 23-24)

A demon at a worship service? (v. 23a)

[23a] Just then¹¹ there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit...

Mark uses the term "demon" and "unclean spirit" interchangeably. And while we might not have expected demons to take up residence in faithful synagogue-goers, there is one in the synagogue in Capernaum on this particular Sabbath.

THIS demon (vv. 23b-24)

[23]...he (i.e. - the demon) cried out, [24] saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

This is the demon speaking, using the vocal chords of the man it has taken control of.¹²

And the unclean spirit has supernatural insight into the nature of Jesus. Without the news being made public, the demon knows that Jesus is "the Holy One of God." And this demon wants nothing to do with "the Holy One of God"!

So the demon (not the man) cried out with a loud voice, begging Jesus, "Leave us alone. Don't destroy us." 13

Jesus summarily dealt with the demon.

Power in the synagogue (v. 25-26)

Casting the demon out (v. 25)

[25] And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"

As opposed to the way others tried to deal with evil spirits, there was no technique to Jesus' exorcism. He simply cast the demon out.

I've heard some people refer to this event as a "power encounter." And the sense I get from that term is that there is a pitched battle between forces of good and evil. This is no such thing.

¹⁰ In the New Testament, scribes are almost never referred to in a positive light.

¹¹ "Just then" = immediately (euthus)

<sup>The New Testament typically envisions the demon in control of its human "host"
physically, emotionally, mentally. The state of the possessed (literally</sup>

[&]quot;demonized") is a pitiful thing.

¹³ There was more than one unclean spirit in this man? There was more than one man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue? There were more unclean spirits in Galilee/Israel than this one? It is not clear to what "us" refers.

There is no pitched battle. It's not a fair fight. Jesus simply told the demon to "stifle" ordered it to leave, leaving the unclean spirit no choice but to obey.

The unclean spirit leaves at the word of Jesus (v. 26)

[26] Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.

Well, if the crowd in the synagogue was amazed at Jesus' teaching, imagine how amazed they were when THIS happened!

A contagious amazement (vv. 27-28)

In the synagogue (v. 27)

[27] They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

Jesus' power was not wielded like Harry Potter's. He didn't have to hold his wand just right and he didn't have to get the incantation just so.

Jesus' power over the spirit world was intrinsic, related to who He was. All He had to do was speak the word, will it - and it was done.

The people had never seen anything like that before and they were genuinely alarmed. ¹⁵ (How would you feel if something like that was to happen here, right now?)

Their question, "Who is this?" comes from people who thought that they knew very well who Jesus was.

"He's that guy from Nazareth. Nice young man. Knows the Bible. A rabbi with a small and unimpressive crowd of disciples."

They now see that whoever He is, He is more than that! And the news of what happened in that synagogue spread like wildfire.

Throughout the region (v. 28)

[28] Immediately¹⁶ the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

You can't keep news like what happened in that synagogue quiet. People were telling Jesus stories as they left the worship service that morning for sure!

Well, after the service was over, Jesus and His followers made their way the short distance from the synagogue to the home of Simon and his extended family.

At Simon's Home (vv. 29-34)

A singular healing (vv. 29-31)

In the home of Simon (v. 29)

[29] And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.¹⁷

There is speculation that Simon's home was the house where Jesus stayed when He wasn't on the road. And that may have been the case.

When they got to the house, there was a health emergency with Simon's mother-in-law.

"Jesus, can you help?" (v. 30)

[30] Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her.

¹⁴ Literally, "Be muzzled" or, perhaps a bit more crassly than Jesus would have said it (but the thought is there), "Shut up!"

¹⁵ The disturbance of men by God had begun. (Lane)

¹⁶ You'll notice yet another "immediately."

¹⁷ There are the ruins of a house in Capernaum, near the ruins of the old synagogue, that have been supposed to be the home of Simon. Maybe...

We don't know what she was suffering with. Today, we know that a fever is a symptom that something is wrong. She could have been suffering with almost anything - an infection, a disease, a wound that hadn't healed properly.

So what would you do if you had a sick family member in the house and had just witnessed Jesus casting a demon out of a man in the middle of a worship service? You'd call Jesus for some help, right?

That is exactly what the people do in this house.

"Jesus, come here and take a look at this. See if there is anything You might be able to do for her."

He dealt with the fever as decisively as He had dealt with the demon.

Total, instant healing (v. 31)

[31] And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them.

The story is told unpretentiously. There is no drama. No words are spoken. He simply walked over to her, gently took her hand and raised her up - and she is, just like that, all better.

Now, I want you to remember how you felt the last time you had a fever and the fever broke. You were tired and "wrung out", right?

Not Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus healed her. He completely restored her to full health with all the energy she needed to wait on her Healer and those with Him.

Now this is the second miracle performed on the day that Jesus collected four disciples. It's been a full day. We can safely assume that following the healing, the family enjoyed a meal together in Simon's home.

The Sabbath is now over and everybody's preparing for a relaxing evening watching TV and eating popcorn when they heard sounds outside the door.

Multitudes healed, released (vv. 32-34)

Capernaum seeks Him (v. 34)

[32] When evening came, after the sun had set,¹⁸ they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. [33] And the whole city had gathered at the door.

And, no, it is not necessary to imagine ten thousand people outside banging on the door. Mark is overstating the case to make the point that there were a lot of people at the house (which is different than lying).¹⁹

Jesus is the talk of the town. And why do you think these people came to Simon's house that night?

Was it because they knew that the Messiah was there and they wanted to hear Him explain the things of God? Did they recognize Jesus as the Son of God and have so come to worship?

Maybe, but I doubt it.

What is likely going on is that they heard about the *single* exorcism during the worship service at the synagogue and they heard about the *single* healing of Simon's mother-in-law in the afternoon. And, having needs themselves, they came to Jesus to see if He would do *multiple* healings and *multiple* exorcisms.

But Jesus had come to preach faith and the coming of the Kingdom. They weren't interested in that stuff. They were interested in the relief of their pain and of their affliction by the hand of a miracle working Healer from Nazareth.

And do you know what is amazing? Jesus accommodated Himself to their desires. He met their perceived needs.

¹⁸ It makes sense that the people delayed their coming to the house until the conclusion of the Sabbath, lest the Sabbath be infringed upon by the carrying of the sick or by acts of healing when there was no immediate risk of loss of life.

¹⁹ He did something similar when he said that ALL Jerusalem and ALL Judea was going to John to be baptized. (1:5)

He blesses Capernaum (v. 34)

[34] And He healed many²⁰ who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

How gracious. How kind. How loving.

We don't know how long He stayed at it that evening. Surely it was hours. It would have taken a long time to have dealt with such a great crowd. I'm betting that Jesus and His followers didn't get to bed till late in the evening or past midnight.

And as we continue reading, we find the next scene detailing an event that is still within the time frame of the first twenty four hours of the four fishermen's career of Jesus following. They wake up after a VERY busy day - and Jesus, their rabbi, is nowhere to be found!

And where is Jesus? Listen

Outside of Capernaum (vv. 35-39)

Jesus, at prayer (v. 35)

[35] In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there

Of the four Gospels, Mark writes about Jesus praying less frequently than any of the other three. But when Mark does mention Jesus at prayer, he always shows Him praying at a time of great crisis.

- He prays in Gethsemene before He is arrested.
- He prays after the feeding of the five thousand and before He walks on water to meet the disciples rowing across the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night.
- He prays here.

Jesus is anticipating a crisis and He knows that there is one place to go when facing a crisis: to prayer. He's got to talk to His Father.

So what does He do? He rises early in the morning, before anybody else in the house is up, while it is still dark outside. He walks away from the house, finds a secluded place where He won't be disturbed, and prays.

The crisis arrives as His four followers locate Him sometime in the morning with a burning question.

Searching for Jesus (vv. 36-37)

[36] Simon and his companions²¹ searched for Him; [37] they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

Do you hear a mild rebuke in that comment? I do.

I hear, "What in the world are You doing, running away from the crowds, Jesus? They're looking for You and You should be with them."

Evidently, they thought that Jesus' mission was to make an impression, elicit a crowd's response, make a splash, grow popular.

And there was a ready crowd back in the city, waiting for Him to perform more magic tricks. "Let's get going, Jesus. Back to Capernaum with You!"

I wonder if this is the crisis He had been up for hours praying about.

His newbie-disciples did not understand His mission - and He is about to blindside them with a serious dose of Messianic reality.

²¹ This is told from Peter's perspective ("Simon and those that were with him")

Most believe that the "many" of verse 34 = the "all" of verse 32.

Jesus, searching (vv. 38-39)

[38] He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." [39] And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

Jesus' mission was far different from what His followers assumed it was. Nowhere are their misconceptions more apparent than here.

They wanted Him to do what I'm sure I would have wanted Him to do. Take advantage of the popular moment. Build success on success..

Meet the needs of the crowd.

But Jesus' goal was not to heal as many people as possible in the least amount of time. It was not to build a base of support sufficient to allow Him to take the throne.

It was to spread the message of the Gospel, by word and deed, throughout the land. He wanted to expose more and more people to His message and to the power of God.

So, while Capernaum was Jesus' base of operations, Jesus was always on the move - to Bethsaida and Chorazin and Gennesaret.

And without taking full advantage of the crowds in Capernaum, Jesus left to tell others the good news, with the four fishermen walking behind Him, shaking their heads in bewilderment.

Conclusion:

Within the first twenty four hours of following, Jesus took these four disciples:

- into the messiness of human need;
- into the marvel of God's amazing grace;
- into a life laboratory that re-oriented their understanding of how God and His world works.

Trust this: If you decide to follow Jesus, He will upset the apple cart of your life. And you may well find yourself wondering, from time to time, "What in the world have I gotten myself into this time?"