

The Day Everything Changed  
Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
The Rev. Ian Burch  
January 22, 2017

Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

I have a good friend in Chicago—a school social worker—who has a perfect record of predicting snow days. He's gotten so good at figuring out when the schools will be closed for inclement weather that co-workers start asking him whether school will be closed at the first sign on snow. I'm not sure what logarithm he uses, but somehow he can glean the likelihood of a school closing by when the snow falls in the day, what type it is, ice on the roads, how many previous snow days there have been etc., etc. I've never known him to be wrong.

Pastors don't really get snow days. I suppose if it's really treacherous, we might cancel Bible study or something. But we'd never cancel a church service. So I haven't had a snow day in a while, but I remember that they can change everything.

I remember that moment, early in the morning, when the world feels cold and a little bit heavy. And you wonder if maybe, just maybe, you're going to get out of school or work—spend the day sledding or drinking hot cocoa. Or maybe you had a test that you didn't quite study for, and you get a reprieve. The world gets shaken out of its routine—its ordinariness. Between one second and the next, everything is different. The world was one way and all of a sudden changes dramatically. I can remember living on the edge of that anticipation. Will they cancel school? Will I get to play in the snow all day? Since my parents were teachers, we didn't have to wait for the radio to announce certain school closings. We'd usually get a phone call at about 5am. I could lie up in my warm bed and still hear the phone from all they way downstairs. When it would ring, I would just KNOW that the whole day was going to change.

Peter, Andrew, James and John. They decided to drop everything and follow Jesus, the Gospel story this morning tells us. The story seems unreal and hasty. In about four sentences, Jesus calls up four disciples. These men drop everything they are doing to follow Jesus in his ministry. Their whole lives—everything changed in an instant after Jesus showed up while they were fishing on the sea of Galilee.

These Gospel stories strike me differently at different times in my life. Lately, I've wondered if I have been conceiving of this story completely the wrong way. I've always thought that Peter, Andrew, James and John were so courageous and brave to drop everything and follow Jesus. "Come, Jesus says, I will make you fishers of people." And they dropped everything. I thought they were kind of super heroes of piety. The instant they encountered Jesus, they became perfect followers. I've thought they they showed super human holiness to be able to recognize the Son of God and to gamely follow along.

But what if it isn't so much that they were holy? What if, instead, the miracle was that they were simply ready. What if they were sitting there, mending their nets and cleaning their fish week after week, waiting for God to show up. Maybe they even had their bags packed and their lunches prepared. Maybe they were looking around for the subtle signs that the world was about to change. I don't know. The text doesn't say. But I'm starting to wonder if they had taken a good look around decided it was best to be prepared.

Peter, Andrew, James and John lived in a scary world. They lived and moved in a world occupied by a foreign power—in fact the most sophisticated and powerful military power the world had ever seen. The empire of Rome was the major political force in their region. And it is safe to say that conquering empires are seldom comfortable for the little fishermen of the world. Maybe these first disciples had been dissatisfied with the world for a long time and were sitting there waiting for God to explode onto the scene.

I like the image of these guys, one eye on the sea and the other eye on the road—looking for Jesus.

It seems to me they were ready for the world to be turned upside down by God—for justice to have its day—for the poor and the vulnerable to be cared for—for vain and cruel leaders to be cast down. And that's a feeling I can resonate with and maybe you can too. The condition of the world can seem too dark, too stressful at times. And I crave change so badly I can almost taste it.

So, maybe we don't need to be too worried about being holy like the disciples. Maybe the trick is simply to be READY. To be ready for when God shows up to do something amazing. Maybe we here at St. Mark's ought to keep one eye on the work we're doing and keep another on the road—looking for when Jesus is going to appear to ask us to follow.

That's the promise that we share here every week—that Jesus shows up. I don't want to scare you too much, but when Jesus shows up, it's usually to send us right back out. So, let's be ready. Let's keep one eye on the road—one ear listening for the telephone. Because we may be called on to follow Jesus and change the world.

I'm not too good at predicting when things will change. I'll leave that to my friend, the snow day Svengali. But I am a good planner. So, I think I will take this Gospel story as a call for being prepared for when Jesus comes down the road. Have I organized my life in such a way that when Jesus asks me to follow, I can say yes? Maybe that's a goal you'd be willing to join me in. We'll lighten up our lives, release some of the silly or nonsensical stuff that we cling to. So that when Jesus does ask us to follow, we are ready to say yes.

Peter, Andrew, James and John weren't magic. And they weren't all that holy. They just had a knack for looking for Jesus to appear. And we can too. Amen.

