

“Follow the Leader”

Mark 1:14-20

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

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This morning our attention is drawn to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. This, by the way, is where Mark’s account of Jesus’ life begins.

If you are looking for the birth narratives in Mark’s gospel, you will be disappointed. There is no manger in Bethlehem, and there are no angels singing, shepherds bowing or Wise Men traveling from afar to see the baby Jesus. You will find these details in Matthew and Luke.

Mark used the words of the prophet, Isaiah, and the bold proclamations of the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, to introduce Jesus to his readers. He also connected the beginning of Jesus’ ministry to something that happened to John the Baptist, and it is this specific incident that I want to focus on today.

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The **time** has come,’ Jesus said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’ ” (Mark 1:14-15)

We all know how important timing is. This is true whether you are playing the piano, hitting a ball, dancing on stage or merging into traffic.

Knowing when to do something is as important as knowing what to do. And Jesus knew both.

It appears Jesus went from Nazareth to the Jordan River to listen to John the Baptist preach and to be baptized. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit of God on

a retreat into the wilderness where he came to grips with what was important to him and how he would conduct his ministry.

Jesus then returned to Nazareth and waited until the time was right to make the most significant change of his life. When that time arrived, Jesus hung up his carpentry tools, closed the door to his shop and began walking those dusty Palestinian roads listening to people's stories so he could respond to them with mercy and grace.

When did Jesus discern the time was right to leave home and embark on this divine mission?

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The **time** has come,' Jesus said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' "

When John was arrested and his prophetic voice was silenced, Jesus knew it was time to begin his ministry. I believe he knew this for two reasons.

John was not going to be released from prison. He had offended too many powerful people with his stinging criticism of their selfish, greedy, immoral lifestyles and their corrupt style of leadership. As a result, John would pay the ultimate price for speaking truth to power. He would be executed.

This meant John's voice would never be heard again, and the silence would be deafening.

Who would take the microphone from John to preach good news of hope and point the way to a better life for all people?

Who would tell the stories of those who had been neglected and forgotten?

Who would be the advocate for those struggling to survive in a world that did not acknowledge their value and worth?

Who would tell people they are important to God and with God's help can become an agent of change in their community?

Who would courageously speak truth to power and hold leaders accountable for their actions and decisions?

Who would pursue justice for those who had no seat at the table where decisions were made?

Who would tell people about the Golden Rule and model a life of integrity, decency, compassion, generosity and respect?

Who would challenge all people, leaders and followers alike, to be honest, fair, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, disciplined, responsible, strong, courageous, kind, compassionate, loyal, faithful and humble?

Who would tell people of God's unconditional love for them and of God's longing to have a personal relationship with them?

Who would tell people of God's amazing grace that would take away shame and guilt and help them rebuild their shattered lives?

Who would tell people of God's ability to heal broken hearts and make hope visible again?

Who would encourage people to reach for the stars and to follow their dreams?

Who would show people a better way to arrange their values and priorities, relate to their neighbors, settle disagreements, handle adversity and deal with temptation?

Jesus knew he was that person, and this was his time. It was now up to him to respond to the changes around him by making changes in his life.

So what did Jesus do? He walked out of the carpentry shop and began walking into the homes and hearts of everyday people who needed to know the true heart and nature of God and to hear the good news God had for them.

What is it time for you to do?

One way to answer this question is to do what Jesus did. Take note of the changes occurring around you.

Who is missing? What is missing? What needs are going unmet?

What do I have to offer? What role can I play in meeting those needs?

What does God think about this? What does God want? What is God saying to me?

Every change that occurs around us, big or small, presents us with new needs to be met and fresh opportunities to serve. These changes also provide ways for us to grow and tap into potential that has been dormant.

Dreams are born out of change and often chaos. This is a time God does his best work and with God's help, we can, too.

Always remember that change is not our enemy, fear is. When our faith is in a God who promises never to leave or forsake us, the changes that occur around us or in us can lead to new possibilities.

When changes occur in your family, at your school, in your neighborhood, in your civic club, among your friends and in our church, listen for the still, small voice of the God who not only sees what's missing but knows what you can do to fill that gap.

Allow God to lead you in a direction that will restore hope to those who may be confused, bewildered, lonely, frightened and depressed. Speak the words they need to hear. Be the role model they need to see. Provide hope for the better tomorrow they need.

One of my favorite parts of our text focuses on the way Jesus called his first disciples after discerning it was time for him to begin his public ministry. "Follow me," he succinctly said to them.

They did, and together they changed the course of history.

I don't think this was the last time Jesus issued that invitation to them.

Every time the disciples encountered the need to make changes in their lives and were overcome with doubt and fear, I believe Jesus said 'follow me'.

Every time the disciples lost their way, made mistakes, came to a crossroads, faced a crisis or felt like quitting, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

Every time the disciples felt intimidated by their challenges and offered excuses for turning them down, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

Every time they felt overwhelmed with the burdens they were carrying and said they could go no further, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

Every time they were confused and bewildered and wanted to throw their hands up in disgust, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

Every time they were angry and upset and wanted to retaliate against those who hurt them, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

Every time the disciples were presented with another opportunity to make hope visible to someone living in despair and thought about passing it up, I believe Jesus said, 'follow me'.

And each time they did, they found Jesus one step ahead of them leading the way to a new and better life.

What Jesus did for his disciples, he wants to do for you and me.

During this season of change in our church and in all the other areas of our lives, may we hear and respond to the one who whispers in our ear, 'follow me'.