



Worship and Sermon Suggestions

1) Hymn suggestions:

a) from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

- 574 Here I Am, Lord
- 575 In Christ Called to Baptize
- 576 We All Are One in Mission
- 579 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
- 580 How Clear is Our Vocation, Lord
- 583 Take My Life, That I May Be
- 593 Drawn to the Light
- 712 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service
- 715 Christ, Be Our Light
- 769 If You But Trust in God to Guide You
- 798 Will You Come and Follow Me
- 801 Change My Heart, O God
- 808 Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song
- 810 O Jesus, I Have Promised
- 817 You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

b) from *With One Voice*:

- 652 Arise, Your Light Has Come!
- 683 Loving Spirit
- 712 Listen, God Is Calling
- 723 The Spirit Sends Us Forth To Serve
- 752 I, the Lord of Sea and Sky
- 753 You Are the Seed
- 754 Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ
- 755 We All Are One in Mission
- 756 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
- 773 Send Me, Jesus
- 776 Be Thou My Vision
- 784 You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

c) from *Lutheran Book of Worship*:

285 Spirit of God, sent from heaven abroad
 286 Bow down your ear, Almighty Lord
 381 Hark, the voice of Jesus calling
 383 Rise up, O saints of God!
 403 Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
 406 Take my life, that I may be
 472/3 Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
 492 O Master, let me walk with you
 494 Jesus call us; o'er the tumult
 503 O Jesus, I have promised

2) Prayer suggestions:

A Let us pray for all people of God, in Christ Jesus, for our brothers and sisters in the human family, for God creation, and for all who are in deed:

Summoning God, we thank you for creating us through the wonders of conception, birth and growth, for claiming us as your children, and for calling us through the waters of baptism. Make us ever aware of the giftedness of life, fill us with joy and gratitude for the gifts of your grace, and help us to use our gifts I service to others, in all that we say and do. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You sent your son, Jesus, to pour out his life for the life of the world. We thank you for our Bishops, Susan and _____, and for all pastors, diaconal ministers and teachers who follow in the way of Jesus, pouring out their lives for others. Continue to raise up faithful servants to guide and equip your people. Give to us all a new passion for ministry, set our hearts ablaze with your love, and fill us with boldness and gladness to share your Good News to all. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You know the needs of your church today. We thank you for pastors and diaconal ministers who have gone before us, who have led your church in the past. Wherever we may live or work, help us to respond to your call – as they did -by dedicating our lives to your service. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You call us together into communities of faith. We thank you for all who share in the life of this congregation and for all who worship here this day. Be with us in our common life together. Open our eyes to recognize the loving presence of Christ in each other. Help us to recognize and encourage those who are called to ministry in our congregation and in your church. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You give each of us opportunities to live out your calling each day. Open our eyes to the opportunities to do your will. Help us to show Christ's love and compassion to our families, neighbors, co-workers and strangers we encounter day by day. Through us, may other know experience the touch of your life-giving presence. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You never forget the needs of those who call to you. We remember before you this day those who are in special need around us: the sick, the lonely, the destitute, the homeless, the persecuted. Especially we pray for _____. Look with compassion upon those in our world who live with injustice, fear, hatred and oppression. Use us to be agents of your love, helping us to respond to the needs of those around us. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

3) Sermon Notes for *It's Your Call* Sunday (Epiphany 3/January 25 2009)
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Gospel Lesson: Mark 1.14-20

If we see Mark as a dramatic work then everything up until this point is more or less background. The focus thus far has been on John the Baptist (Mark 1.2-8) and Jesus' baptism and temptation (1.9-13). Now comes the time when, as it were, the author calls out "Action!" That is, in today's Gospel Lesson (Mark 1.14-20) Jesus declares his mission publicly and calls his first disciples.

a) Mark 1.14-15:

These verses are a public announcement or manifesto declaring what Jesus' ministry is all about in summary form. Verse 14 says that "Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God." The phrase "good news" derives from texts such as Isaiah 40.9 and especially Isaiah 61.1-2: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring **good news** to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn..." The "good news" in such texts was understood by many Jews in Jesus' day to refer to the coming of God's reign. What made the followers of Jesus distinct was that they believed that the promised reign of God was no longer in the future – it was present, here and now, through Jesus. And so the Christians used the term "good news" (or "Gospel") for their proclamation that God's reign on earth has begun Christ. That

“good news” is alive and well in the proclamation of the Gospel that is key to the church and its ministry today.

On this *It's Your Call* Sunday we could remind each other that the message we proclaim really is “good news” (which is what “Gospel” means). It is **news** because it comes from God and not us, it is not something we thought up or that we could have come up with on our own. And this news from God is **good**! Against the “bad news” that seems so prevalent in our world today, the Gospel comes to us as **good news** that God graciously loves all people. Those who are called to ministry in the church have the task of sharing that glad and glorious “good news” message publicly from the pulpit each Sunday – what a tremendous joy and privilege it is to be called to this ministry of the Word!

Mark 1.15 sums up Jesus' own preaching of this Word: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." "The time is fulfilled" is standard language for the end times when the Messiah would come (cf. Mk 13.4; Gal 4.4; Eph 1.10). The long wait is over, and the reign of God is underway at last! The phrase "kingdom of God" or “reign of God” does not refer to a geographical place or a group of people; rather, the emphasis is on the verb (to reign) and on God. It is God's rule, God's reign--especially as it was believed that would come into effect at the end of time as a state of universal righteousness and justice and wholeness and peace (shalom). The message of the early Christians was that in Jesus God's kingdom was no longer off in the future but it was here already. It was the presence of God's kingdom “at hand” – here and now – that was the distinctive message of Jesus' earliest followers.

In Mark, the announcement that "the kingdom of God has come near" also points to the One who is making the announcement – Jesus himself – who is establishing the Kingdom on earth. In other words, for Mark the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom in verse 15 is also an implicit christological confession concerning Jesus and his identity, i.e. that Jesus is the Messiah. In early Christian proclamation, the message about the reign of God was inseparable from Jesus himself. Especially in the 19th century some scholars tried to separate these two themes, claiming that Jesus himself only preached a message about the Kingdom while later Christians (especially Paul) confused Jesus' message by focusing instead on Jesus himself (i.e. Jesus' death and resurrection, his identity as the Messiah and Son of God, etc.). In fact, the evidence from Paul as well as Mark (and the other Gospels) shows that Jesus' message was inseparable from Jesus' identity in the minds of the early Christians. The proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom was itself a proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah. The Gospel of Mark in particular demonstrates that for the early Christians the cross and the resurrection were intimately connected to the whole notion of the reign of God coming to earth.

The practical response to the message of verse 15a is given in 15b: since the Kingdom IS here, therefore "repent" and "believe in the good news". In the original Greek, the term "repent" (*metanoiein*) is not just a matter of the mind or the will or the emotions, the concept of "repentance" is much more than that: it involves the whole person and our relationships with God and with one another. (A great text that expresses the Biblical understanding of repentance is Joel 2.12-13.) Such a holistic concept of repentance is

paralleled with "believing in the Gospel" in v.15: "believing" is not just a matter of intellectually accepting that something is true but trusting with one's whole self in God's reign over one's life and living that out in practice day by day.

b) Mark 1.16-20 (The calling of the first disciples)

Since the disciples play such a large role in the overall story, they need to be introduced very close to the beginning of Mark. The point of these verses is the nature of Christ's call and the nature of people's response to that call. The fact that these were fishermen makes sense of the statement that Jesus will make them "fishers of people" (v.17). The image of "catching" people was familiar from the Hebrew Scriptures as a description of being caught by God's judgment (Jer 16.16; Amos 4.2; Hab 1.15-17). However, Jesus reinterprets the image to express the work he is calling the disciples to do, i.e. "catching" people out of the "waters" of the world for the Kingdom using the "net" of the Gospel. This is another wonderful image for *It's Your Call* Sunday because ministry is very much about "fishing" for people. Sometimes such work can be hard, and it seems like the "fish aren't biting": but we are only called to faithfully set out the "net" of the Gospel through which God will touch people and bring them into God's reign.

Aside from the fact that they were fishermen, the text gives little other information about the disciples themselves. Instead, the way the story is told emphasizes the unilateral, gracious choice of Jesus himself. Why does Jesus choose these particular people to be his disciples? Jesus' calling of the disciples is an act of sheer grace. So too, the call to ministry is by grace alone! And the text also points out the cost of the disciples' response. In the case of the first two who are called, Simon and Andrew, they leave behind their nets and follow Jesus (v.18); that is, they leave behind their career, their means of livelihood. In the case of the second two disciples who are called, James and his brother John, they leave behind their father Zebedee (v.20); that is, they leave behind their family ties. (The mention of the "hired servants" in v.20 reinforces the sense that James and John are abandoning their father; all Zebedee has left to help him are "hired hands".) The point is: the disciples' response to Jesus' call is decisive and radical, it means being willing to give up all the old, familiar ties – all reliance on one's past (cf. Lk 9.57-62; Mk 10.28-31; even Matt 10.37-38 and Lk 14.26-27). The goal of such renunciation is that the disciples follow and walk together with Jesus by faith. In his classic commentary on Mark (2nd ed., New York, 1966), p. 169, Vincent Taylor writes "In all the Gospels *akoloutheo* [the verb "to follow"] is used ... to describe attachment to the person of Jesus, personal surrender to his summons, and acceptance of his leadership." We are called to follow Jesus by faith, trusting him and following his way of love in our relationships with one another. This also, of course, is the essence of the call to ministry in the church.