Text: Mark 1:14-20

**Introduction**

If there is one question that ever Christian needs to answer for themselves, I think it is: “What does it mean to be a disciple?”

At the Ascencion of Jesus, he gives the disciple or those we call the apostles the great commission. In modern words that’s the mission statement of the church. That mission statement has four verbs – actions words – that tell the church – the apostles – what they are to do. And I know I’m probably stretching everybody’s middle school grammar here, but there is one main verb and three helping verbs. The one main verb in the main activity. Jesus says “make disciples.” The mission statement is to make disciples. The other three verbs give some indication how to do that. Go. That one always seems to get the most attention. Although it is probably better taken as something like “as you live you lives.” As you live you lives, make disciples, baptizing – the 2nd helper verb. Baptizing and teaching – the last one.

How are the apostles, and the apostolic church, to make disciples – living, baptizing, and teaching.

**Text**

But collectively knowing what the church is to be about, doesn’t answer the individual’s question: what does it mean for me to be a disciple?

Does living for us mean literally to go? There are certain things about the life and ministry of Jesus that I envy. The ability to do miracles being the biggest one. And yes, I know that lots of people see him do miracles and don’t believe. It isn’t as big a deal as we poor non-miracle workers think. But right up there is the clarity of what Jesus was calling Simon and Andrew, James and John, and the other to. “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And they immediately left their nets. Or they immediately left their father. Is that what Jesus meant discipleship always to be?

If he did, it makes some other hard sayings of Jesus easier. “Anyone who loves their mother or father more than me is not worthy of me.” If being a disciple means literally going and you stick around to bury your father, you’ve failed the text. In some ways that is Jonah’s problem. God told him to go. Go to Nineveh. Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh. He despised the Ninevites. And even after God makes him go, it isn’t like he fulfilled the calling with gusto. “Ninevites, you’ve got 40 days, so long.” There was no baptizing or teaching from Jonah. Yet as poor as the message was, it had God’s desired effect. “The people of Nineveh believed God and called a fast.”

Jesus’ call to the apostles, to Jonah, is rather simple. But there is a difference between those we call apostles and disciples. The apostles are literally the sent ones. The old testament prophets also, when they received their call, were usually sent to specific people with specific messages. I wouldn’t deny that some people have such a call. But Jesus makes all of his people disciples, but only a few apostles. What might be rather straight forward for someone with the vocation of apostle, becomes a little more complicated for other vocations. The great saints lives are quite difficult in some ways, usually ways involving blood and confrontation, but they are easy in others, the moral clarity and conviction of mission.

So assuming nobody here feels like they are an apostle. What does it mean for us more humble to be a disciple?

**Christology**

I think Jesus’ initial preaching gives us a good start, some of the universal elements of being a disciple.

First, “the time is fulfilled.” The disciple of Jesus should be aware of the time they live in. This is what Paul is talking about to the Corinthians, “the appointed time has grown very short.” That might sound ridiculous 2000 years later, but to say that misses Jesus’ point. In the incarnation and life of Christ all times have been fulfilled. The trumpet could blow tomorrow and the entire creation be rolled up. It’s a worn cloth. We can all feel it. There is groaning to creation. Not that it isn’t still good, but there is something more desiring to be called forth. God is patient, waiting for the full number, but that number has been known from eternity. And Jesus on that cross and in his resurrection has cast aside everything that stands in the way. Our sins and everything that separated us from the Holy Kingdom have been paid for. The people of God have been redeemed. That sealing from all eternity has been realized in time in our baptisms. “The time is fulfilled.”

The disciple should live aware of that…and be watchful. If the anxieties and activities of this temporal realm engross us too much, the disciple risks not having oil for their lamps, or being outside the closed door, of turning down the invite to come to the feast because I’ve got to buy a field. The disciple lives knowing that the time is fulfilled.

“The Kingdom of God is at hand.” That might sound like a repeat of “the time is fulfilled,” but let me try and make a distinction. Today, we live under two authorities. The Kingdom of God is definitely something that is present – is at hand. The promises of God are things that the Kingdom rules directly. Christ has promised that those waters of baptism are not simple water only. The Spirit is given in those water. Baptism now saves you. Christ has promised to be present where two or three are gathered – in Word and Sacrament. He has promised to hear our prayers. These are things we can say Christ rules directly. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The disciple recognizes these gifts of the Kingdom. But this world also has the authority of Caesar and the powers that be. Unlike the promises – the grace of God – which he rules directly, the laws are ruled indirectly…by means. And those means can be wicked servants such as Satan. They are often fallen humans. And that Kingdom of the law often substitutes its own desires for the Word of God. It will often attempt to put its laws contrary to the grace. It will offer all kinds of goodies if you worship the creation instead of the creator. If you worship the one who can give you something temporal now, instead of the grace of eternity.

The disciple know that “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” That time when Christ shall raise the scepter. When all the Kingdoms of this world, become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. The disciple learns to live in the tension of that Kingdom. Recognizing the temporal authority without betraying the eternal. Because the “The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

**Moral**

So, what does that mean for how the disciple actually lives? The biggest word is Jesus’ next word – “Repent.” The first of Luther’s 95 Theses quotes this saying “that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”

Does that mean the entire life of the disciple is spent in fasting and sackcloth?

I don’t think that is what is meant. There are lots of religious rituals that can become prideful exhibitions. Repentance is certainly one of them. Instead the disciple of Jesus lives in the tension of this world. We know that we do the things we don’t want to do, and we ignore the things we should do. But maybe even more to the point the disciple recognizes that if we are being honest about all the demands of all of our vocations – there is not enough time in the day to fulfill them all. And knowing this, we still will spend 5 hours watching football. We are limited creatures. Made even more limited by our addiction to sin. Repentance is the acknowledgement that we are powerless, and submitting our lives to Christ. Submitting them to the Spirit to enlighten, sanctify and keep.

The disciple lives a life of repentance. A life submitted to the struggle of the Spirit against our own flesh.

**Eschatology**

But why would we do this? All of those things could fall on our ears like Jonah’s proclamation to Nineveh. “You gays don’t have a chance. The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. And even repentance is just a recognition of the struggle that we lose too often.”

“Believe the gospel – Believe the good news.”

The only reason anyone would do any of this is because of the gospel. The disciple remains a disciple because they believe Jesus. That he has come not just as our judge, but as our savior. That Christ has come not to cast us out, but to create a path. That Christ is not our final defeat, but the victory over all our enemies: the end of our sin, the casting out of Satan, and our way past death.

You have been baptized. You have been taught. Believe the good news. The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom is as hand. A great catch of fish has been brought in by fishers of men. The Kingdom is for you. That faith is the core of the disciple. Amen