

What would make you drop everything and pursue an entirely new life?

A great job offer? Winning the lottery? A clean bill of health?

How about a chance to make a huge difference in another part of the world?

What would be your answer?

What if it was a former carpenter now travelling preacher talking about the kingdom of God?

That's exactly what happened in the scripture you just read.

Mark tells us that after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee and started proclaiming the kingdom of God. We don't know how long this was after his baptism and time in the wilderness. There are few other details.

As Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, he calls out to several fishermen and bids them follow and they do just that.

We don't know, for instance, if they didn't really like fishing and were eager for a chance to do something different. Nor do we know whether Simon and Andrew, James and John already knew each other.

That might make it easier to imagine that once one of them decided to follow Jesus the others were soon to follow. Or maybe one or more of them already knew Jesus -- maybe they'd heard him preach and teach, even talked with him before and were already considering joining him. That would make the immediacy of their response more understandable to us.

But, again, we don't really know any of this. What we do know is that there was something compelling enough about Jesus and his message that prompted these four -- and later many others -- to follow him, to become his disciples, students of this teacher and servants of his mission.

I think Mark tells this story of disciples willing to follow Jesus to inspire people like you and I to follow Jesus.

However, I doubt that Mark imagined people following Jesus in quite the same way. So perhaps Mark's message to those reading back in the first century -- as well as to those of us following along in the twenty-first -- was more about following Jesus in general than it was about following Jesus only by leaving everything to proclaim the coming kingdom of God.

Except that we can never follow "in general." We follow him in particular and distinct ways that may or may not be like the first disciples.

Perhaps we follow by pursuing a new career.

Perhaps we follow by volunteering to make life easier for others.

Perhaps we follow by looking out for those who always seem on the outside and invite them in.

Perhaps we follow by doing a job we love as best we can to help others.

Perhaps we follow by doing a job we hate but pays the mortgage and feeds our family.

Perhaps we follow by being generous with our wealth and with our time.

Perhaps we follow by listening to those around us and responding with encouragement and care.

Perhaps we follow by caring for an aging parent, or special needs child, or someone else who needs our care.

Perhaps we follow by....

Well, you get the idea.

There is any number of distinct ways that we can follow Jesus. And, indeed, follow him immediately – here and now, in the world and time in which we live.

What seems at the heart of the matter is that we can follow Jesus in all of these different situations and circumstances precisely by trying to imitate him – by trying, that is, to treat others with the same regard, love and patience that he did, including all manner of people but especially those who were overlooked by society.

This, I believe, is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian: to try to live and treat others as Jesus did, embracing the values of inclusiveness, love, forgiveness, and healing that he demonstrated in word and deed.

Jesus said to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and he says to us today, "Follow me."

I want to encourage you to do likewise. Say yes when Jesus calls and follow the way of Jesus in everything you do and say.

Amen.