

- *This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.* These are the first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Mark which is the Joe Friday of Gospels: first on the scene and bare bones, “just the facts, Ma’am.”
- Jesus announces the Kingdom of God. In its fullness the kingdom will make plain the triumph of God over evil, over sickness even over death itself. With this cry, Jesus emerges into public life.
 - There is a sense of urgency. John the Baptist had been arrested and later killed for preaching even less radically the same message.
 - Jesus knows he does not have all the time in the world and He wants to spread this Good News as far and as wide as He can. And the very first thing He does is search for people to help Him.
- *Come after me...* These are the second words that Jesus speaks in Mark’s Gospel.
 - Sometimes, as we hear their immediate response to the invitation of Jesus, we’re tempted to think Peter and Andrew, James and John were predisposed to say “yes.” They’re saints after all. But they did not start out that way and they certainly weren’t when they met Jesus.
 - And when they met Jesus, Peter and Andrew and James and John, were not simply standing around waiting for God. No, if you’ll pardon the pun, they had other fish to fry. They were going about their daily lives, taking care of their families, trying to get along and do their jobs.

- For them it was fishing and boats and nets and the sea. For us, it's work and school, home and office. We're dropping off the kids, making meals, watching television, going to bed and getting up and doing it again.
- And into this, Jesus has come calling us to follow Him. Like Peter and Andrew, James and John, we're not predisposed to say yes. We're busy, doing good things but busy. And anyway, we can also be a bit hesitant, shy, or awkward in our faith. We know we want something but we're not sure what. It may be Jesus but we're not sure how He fits into our lives.
 - Perhaps we're sure of our attraction but find it difficult to commit, difficult to go further, difficult to change our hearts, habits and lives.
 - Or, perhaps we're like Jonah from our first reading: confused by the message, afraid of not living up to the task, avoiding the Messenger, spending his life running.
- Each of us has different questions, different searches for meaning, different routes we are traveling. But the answer for each questions, finding meaning, the destination of each route is always the same: Jesus Christ. As He did with Andrew and Peter, James and John, Jesus comes looking for us.
- And notice how Jesus comes looking. Simply He invites Andrew and peter and James and john to come after Him. He doesn't try to answer their questions or lay out a plan. He doesn't fill their heads with doctrine or rules. He doesn't tell them how to live, or what they need to change. He doesn't tell them what to read or do.

- He simply invites. He invites them to an encounter, to come into His presence. Whatever their questions, awkwardness, and hesitancy: Jesus simply invites: *Come after me*. And Jesus invites us with the same words. *Come after me*.
- Jesus will not immediately try to answer all of our questions, nor does He invite us to a physical place. Rather He invites us to come closer, to encounter Him, asking us gently to put aside our fear or any hesitation, simply to come closer to Him.
- Jesus wants to share the love and mercy of our Heavenly Father, not because we we're perfect but precisely because we're not.
 - Jesus wants us to know the delight God takes in us, not because we we're good, but because God created us in His image and likeness and knows us full well, even and including the darkness in our hearts and the sin in our lives.
 - To encounter Christ is to step into the perfect love that God has for us. But this is not merely some "love-fest."
 - A true encounter with Christ, experiencing the love of our Heavenly Father, not in some general way but for ME, this experience gives me a new perspective. A true encounter with Jesus Christ launches a whole new reality. It's more than believing in Jesus or saying He is Lord.
 - In a true encounter, our hearts are touched. We want to know Jesus better. We seek His presence in prayer and listen to His words in the Bible. We want to learn more about Him and His Church, how Christ calls us to act.

- In a true encounter, we seek to come closer to Jesus, to commit ourselves to Him through prayer: both quiet daily prayer and through the public celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.
- Then, as we are getting to know Him better, Jesus seeks to open our hearts that He can use our vulnerability
- Jesus seeks to shape us into His disciples and that's why he adds the second part: *and I will make you fishers of men (and women)*.
 - Jesus loves Peter and Andrew, James and John as they are but also knows where God is calling them. He has chosen THEM wants them to help Him, not because they have all the answers but simply because they have responded to His invitation, and allowed Him to change their hearts.
 - Jesus will need to shape and inform and reshape and reform their passion and love, even after He has Risen from the dead.
 - Their faith will be tested; both will have to struggle and their journey will be filled with misunderstanding, fear, confusion, pain, and doubt.
 - But this faith, this closeness with Jesus will also bring them the Father's love and mercy in a radical new way, along with hope for the future, forgiveness for their sins, and strength and guidance when they are struggling.
- Remember last week, when Jesus gave Peter a new name? It signaled a new mission. So, too, God has given us a name as well. It happened at our baptism and like Peter, Jesus now wants to draw us closer, draw us into our own personal encounter.

- Like them, if we truly encounter Christ, we will be different. Jesus invited them not only to draw close to Him but once strengthened, once nourished, to go and share.
- Jesus draws us close so He can send us out because we have responded to His invitation, and allowed Him to change our hearts. God has so designed the plan of salvation that Jesus needs you and I take a part.
- It's what Saint Paul is talking about in our second reading both this week and last:
 - Our encounter with Christ can change us so profoundly that every action we perform, every relationship we have, every process undergo is different. We can take nothing and no one for granted.
 - As he said last week, our bodies are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we house and are called to share God's presence. In fact, we house God's presence as profoundly as the Temple in Jerusalem or the Tabernacle behind you.
 - Saint Paul reminds us that through our bodies, through our actions, no matter the relationship, we can share God's love with others, not merely to tell them about Jesus Christ but to offer them the same love of the Father Jesus brought to us.
- In other words, we are called to share our encounter with Jesus. After we have come and seen, we are called to go and share, to proclaim the Good News, to offer the love we have received to each and every one we encounter.

- Like Peter and the others, we're unsure of what to say or to do, of how to follow Jesus, how to join Him on the journey. Like them, we will experience misunderstanding, fear, confusion, pain, doubt.
- But if we stick close to Jesus, if we allow Jesus in our encounter to shape and inform and reshape and reform our love, we will also experience the Father's love and mercy in a radical new way, along with hope for the future, forgiveness for our sins, and strength and guidance when we are struggling.
- Notice who's doing the action in that second part. Jesus says that **HE** will **make us** fishers of men (and women). All we need to do is become vulnerable, open to God's love for us, willing to be shaped and formed ever further into His disciples. Easier said than done.
- Search. Encounter. Journey. These are the three steps to any relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - Peter and Andrew, James and John are all searching for something, each in his own way.
 - Andrew starts as a disciple of John the Baptist.
 - Peter is a passionate man who speaks before he thinks;
 - James and John are so filled with energy and drive Jesus gives them a nick name: "sons of thunder."
 - They want something more than their daily lives but are not sure what that is or how to get it.
- We've got that down, don't we: all kinds of unanswered questions about life, unfinished searches for meaning and purpose, routes to happiness filled with detours, pit stops, and delayed beginnings, an emptiness still in our hearts which we can't fill on our own.

- And we're hesitant about the other two steps, to Encounter Christ and to Journey with Jesus. These we aren't so sure about. What does it mean to encounter Christ? How can I follow Him? And that's why I encourage you to come to our mission.
- The mission is focused on facilitating the encounter with Jesus and then on following Him on the journey. Mr. Ron Huntley, whose job title at Saint Benedict's parish where he worked was the Director of Making People Awesome, is the most dynamic speaker I know, filled with passion, enthusiasm, and JOY.
- With this mission, he wants to enhance our encounter with Christ and then help us along on the journey to follow Jesus. Whether you're new to faith, or a life-long believer, this mission will help you to grow, lean into the fear that holds us back, and feel more comfortable to come and see and then go and tell.
- We have been caught by Christ, ensnared in the nets of God's Love. Now Jesus wants us to go fishing for others.