

Will you pray with me? Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A lot of you know that before I came to Saint Barnabas or to school in New Jersey, I lived in north Texas and studied computer science and math in an engineering college. Whenever I wasn't in class during the summer, I would work for "Reed, Wells, Benson and Co., Consulting Engineers (or RWB for short)." When I was at RWB I was a draftsman, getting drawings of building floor plans from architects covered in red pencil marks from the engineers telling me where to put electrical outlets and HVAC ductwork. I would sit in my cubicle and put those red pencil marks into the computer, so that the contractors could actually read them while trying to put up the building.

It was pretty nice to work there. I'd sit in a cubicle with a cushy chair in an air-conditioned office, which sure beats mowing lawns during a hot Texas summer. It was even better because the W in RWB, the Wells, was my dad. Sure, we hardly ever saw each other, being on opposite rungs of the ladder. But, I think that I probably got a little bit of special treatment being the son of the boss. My sister Jennifer also worked there as a receptionist at the front desk. Here's to nepotism.

But I had been working there for about three summers when I met Joshua. Joshua was a co-worker of mine, Jewish, and in his mid-thirties. One day he came by my desk, worked up and excited about something. All he said was, "Jason, quick, come with me!" Then he started to walk off toward the office back door. I didn't know what to do! So, I put down the floor plan I was looking at and followed Joshua. I followed Josh right out of the office from where I was, in

that air-conditioned cubicle working for dad. I immediately got up and followed him and never went back to that office again.

Well, maybe I'm being a little overdramatic. You can check the payrolls of RWB and you'll see that no one named Joshua worked there when I did. But, this is what I do know: I used to have a comfortable place to be: a good summer job and promising offers for when I graduated from college. But now, I followed this mysterious Jewish man named Joshua. Or, as his name was pronounced when he was growing up in Hebrew school: Yeshua. Or again, as his name is pronounced in the church: Jesus.

This is what our Gospel reading was all about today: Simon and Andrew, two brothers, and James and John, also two brothers, were called by Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua away from their work, fishing out on the Sea of Galilee. You can just see James and John at one end of the boat, mending holes in the worn-out fishing nets. Meanwhile their father Zebedee is at the other end, giving instructions to the other hired men in the boat. It sure seems like a good living: out in the cool sea breeze, working for dad. But, this mysterious stranger came and said "Follow me." Immediately, James and John drop their nets. They leap out of the boats and swim for the shore, leaving behind their father, their family, their jobs, their lives, their comfort and security.

So, Simon and Andrew and James and John became the first disciples. At the invitation of Jesus, they gave up so many comforts. They left behind their households and became homeless. They left their parents and became orphans. They left their careers and became unemployed. Clearly, the life of discipleship is an uncertain life. There are many risks to be taken, where we aren't allowed to depend on our own talents to save us and give us a long life but we rather live by what only Jesus offers: grace. Throughout the New Testament, the words "grace," "power," and "Holy Spirit" are often used together, and they describe the life of the

disciple. As Christians, we know that at our baptism, we receive those three things: grace, power, and presence of the Holy Spirit. All these marks of discipleship come to us. These first disciples ran through the water of the Sea of Galilee in order to answer the call Jesus gave. We run through the water of baptism so that we can also be his disciples and answer the call.

These marks (grace, power, and the Holy Spirit) don't make us perfect—look at Simon, also called Peter. As Jesus is going to trial before Pontius Pilate, Simon Peter denies that he ever knew Jesus, and that they were even from the same part of town. The disciples other aren't perfect either, throughout the Gospel of Mark, they constantly misunderstand what Jesus is saying and what his mission is. But, as they were disciples, so are we. They made mistakes and so do we. Discipleship is about a life long relationship with Jesus. Think about some of the life long relationships you have had maybe a mother or father, a sister or brother, a wife or husband. Have there ever been misunderstandings? Has there ever been anger? Hurt feelings? Now let me ask this: Don't you still love each other? Haven't you wanted to patch things up and make things right again? That's what our relationship with Christ is like: it doesn't matter if we are angry at God about something—because that's OK. It doesn't matter if we feel like God has let us down or disappointed us in the past. No matter what we can always come back. We can always be welcomed, no matter what our past is like, and try again at being a disciple of Jesus.

But, today's Gospel lesson is really only half of the story. We have four disciples, Simon, Andrew, James, and John. The rest of the Twelve haven't appeared yet. Besides, all that this passage tells us is that discipleship is about giving up the comfortable things and following Jesus. Where are we going to follow? If we move on from this passage to Mark 3:13-20, we can get the rest of the story, where the rest of the disciples get named.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he

might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast our demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (*Mark 3:13-20, NIV*)

So here are the twelve disciples and Jesus gives them two things: a name and a mission. First of all, he calls them apostles. Literally, the word apostle means “a person who is sent.” Sent out to deliver a message, to run an errand, or anything else. Each of the disciples is an apostle. Following the call of Jesus, either out of the boat or onto the mountainside, is what makes us a disciple. But in following, we are also sent away and become apostles. This action of gathering together and sending out is the foundation of the Christian life.

Later on, in the book of Acts, the word apostle is equated with the word “overseer” or “supervisor,” which comes from a Greek word: *episkopos*. *Episkopos*—does it sound familiar? Like, say, Episcopal? Because we are Episcopalians, we are each apostles, sent out into the world to follow Jesus. Each one of us here has the same calling as a disciple, as an apostle, as an Episcopalian, as a Christian.

I still haven’t managed to get at what that calling *is*, though. Let me re-read Mark 3:14, and we’ll find the three things that Jesus calls us to. “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they (1) might be with him and that (2) he might send them out to preach and (3) to have authority to cast our demons (Mark 3:14-15).”

To be with him. Here it is again: the call to discipleship is a call to a life long relationship with Jesus. We know that in this relationship God is always with us and will not abandon us. In this building we gather week by week as the people of God so that we might have exactly this: the real presence of Jesus with us, known in the Word of God and in the Sacrament. But what else is our charge as apostles?

To be sent out to preach. Just yesterday, twenty-two of us disciples met at the Vincentian Renewal Center for the Parish Leadership Retreat. While we were there, I heard, more than once, some concern over the longest four-letter word I've ever heard (parents, cover your children's ears now): *evangelism*. Evangelism is the whole trick to this whole discipleship business. Often I wish if I could just stop at "to be with him." I don't know about you, but sharing my faith is **hard**. There are all kinds of anxiety: what if I just irritate this person? What if they ask me questions I can't answer? Will they think I'm just crazy? But there are definitely more polite ways to preach and to do evangelism than to stand out on a street corner, yelling and handing out pamphlets that say "Repent!" and "The Kingdom of God is near!" This church has a lot to offer the township of South Brunswick. We have a youth group, a choir, men's and women's fellowships, outreach opportunities, progressive dinners—the list goes on and on. Wouldn't it be easy to ask a friend if she or he would like to come along to the spaghetti dinner? Or to the men's club game night? Or anything else? Just a few Sundays ago, two of our youth invited their friends to come to our youth group. To evangelize, we don't have to be judgmental and convince someone that their beliefs are outright wrong and yours are holy, pious, orthodox, and right. All it takes is a little invitation. That's all that Jesus gave to Simon and Andrew: a little invitation. "Come with me."

Now for the third point: this is the fun one: *To have authority to cast out demons*. What can **this** mean for us? Are we supposed to keep an eye out for someone that looks demon-possessed, showing all the signs that Linda Blair did in the movie *The Exorcist*? Probably not. I do believe that demons are real and that exorcisms do happen. However, like Morris Maddocks, I think that they are extremely rare. Maddocks is a bishop in the Church of England who is one of the big names in the world of Christianity and healing. He has been a bishop for forty years

and during those forty years as the front man for Christian healing he has seen exactly **two** cases of real demon possession. Very real, but also very, very rare.

But, as apostles, each one of us has the authority to cast out demons. What else could this mean in our world? I think that it is an invitation to fight against evil in this world. However, the evil we encounter most is not going to be a red demon with a pointy tail and horns. The evil that we can fight against is everywhere. It is in racism. It is in sexism. It is in societies that help the poor to stay poor and the hungry to stay hungry and the sick to stay sick. It is in societies (and even in our church), wherever people are discriminated against for being black, for being Hispanic, for being homeless, for being unemployed, for being female, or for being homosexual. These are some of the evils we can fight against—this is how we can cast out demons. At Saint Barnabas, we participate at the Elijah’s Promise soup kitchen, and the Mens’ Shelter, and the Women Aware shelter, and Habitat for Humanity and any other of the **fourteen** outreach ministries listed in our Annual Parish Report last week. When we help them, we cast out demons from this world and work to end evils like domestic violence and unjust poverty. This is the reason why every time Episcopalians pray together they say the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done **on earth as it is in heaven.**” We need God’s help to cast out demons and to work for justice. Whenever we care for these needs we answer the call from Jesus to be his disciples.

[Leave pulpit to conclude sermon in the midst of the congregation.]

I want to close today with a couple of remarks on church architecture. Since you all have recently built a new church building, you may know some of the technical terms that are a part of that whole process. The area on the inside of the altar rail is, technically, the *sanctuary*. Next to it, you have the *choir*, as you might expect. The ministers sit on the other side in a spot called

the *chancel*. But there's one more part. [Walk into the center aisle.] The place where the congregation sits is called the *nave*. Like a lot of words, *nave* is a Latin term that gives us a lot of other words like *nautical* and *Navy*. The word *nave* means *boat*. Whenever we join together for Sunday worship, we sit together in a boat. Just like those first disciples, Simon and Andrew and James and John, we sit out in a boat, taking part of our lives, families, and careers. Just like those disciples, we disciples are receiving a call from Jesus. "Follow me." How can **you** follow Jesus?