

Today we begin a 2-part miniseries in the Gospel of Mark called, *How Jesus Touches Lives*.

We'll begin by diving right into our main scripture text for today. If you have a Bible with you, whether in print or in digital, I invite you to turn to Mark, chapter 1, verses 14-20. Alternatively, you can follow along on the screen. I'll be reading from the New Living Translation:

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and followed him. A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.¹

The first time we hear Jesus' voice in the Gospel of Mark, he's saying, "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" That's what the word *gospel* means— good news. News that brings joy.

The word "gospel" was frequently used by the wider public in Jesus' day. A gospel was the announcement of a major event that was supposed to change history for the better. It could be news of a king's coronation. When Caesar Augustus was crowned as Roman emperor, it was announced throughout the land as *gospel*, as good news. When the Greeks won great victories against the invading Persians, they sent *evangelists*— proclaimers of good news— throughout the countryside to tell the citizens. Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God, and why is it good news?

In the book of Genesis chapters 1-2, the Bible tells us that we were created to live in a world where all relationships are whole and healthy— relationships between God and people, between people and people, between people and the planet. This relational flourishing was possible because of God's kingship.

But Genesis chapter 3, human beings reject having God as their King. Each of us has decided to be our own king, as it were, and such self-centeredness destroys relationships. Why is there family breakdown? Why are there struggles between the sexes and classes and races? Why are there wars? Why is earth's environment in such bad shape? It all comes back to the darkness of human self-centeredness, which the Bible calls *sin*. When we reject God as the true King, everything unravels; it all falls apart.

And yet deep down, we long for ourselves and for the world to be made whole again. Perhaps this is why we find a similar theme in many of the world's best and most beloved stories—the theme that a

¹ Mark 1:14-20 (NLT)

true king will come to our rescue, slay the dragon, set us free from our imprisonment in the dungeon, and awaken from death's dark slumber with a kiss. A true king will come back to put everything right and renew the entire world.

The Good News of the Kingdom of God is that Jesus is the true King who comes to ultimately put everything right and renew the whole world once and for all.

There's a line from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* that says, "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so the rightful king could ever be known." When you submit your life to Jesus, the true King, not only will he bring his healing touch into your life. He will also begin to make your hands an extension of his own healing hands.

One way the meaning of the Kingdom of God can be encapsulated is in this phrase:

The Kingdom of God

God's will to restore God's world through God's people in God's time.

Note that in establishing his kingdom, his rule and reign over creation, God works *through his people*— through those of us who follow Jesus— that we might be his kingdom agents— his healing hands in this world.

How does Jesus touch lives? In this miniseries, we'll see that Mark's Gospel points to the fact that the primary way Jesus touches lives is through his people— people like you and me. That's how God works out his kingdom plan for this world. Every day, Jesus touches the lives of people everywhere, and most of the time, he does so through his disciples— through those of us who follow him as Master.

In the passage we read earlier, we find Jesus calling his very first disciples to himself—just some ordinary, everyday fishermen— so we know from the get-go that you don't need to have any special social standing or academic degrees or professional qualifications or religious credentials to be called to follow this Master. "Come, follow me," said Jesus to these gruff fishermen. And then he told them what following him was going to involve: "I will show you how to fish for people!"

Jesus is speaking metaphorically here, of course. By "fishing for people" Jesus is telling us that embedded in the call to follow him is the call to also help others become followers of Jesus.

"The way I like to fish for people— the way I like to save and heal and touch and transform lives," says Jesus, "is through *you*, my disciples."

In fact, during the remainder of this message, and in next week's message as well, when one of us pastors asks you, "How does Jesus touch lives?" I'd like you to respond by saying, "Through us!" Let's practice:

How does Jesus touch lives?

Through us!

“Will you answer my call?” says Jesus. “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people. Come, follow me, and not only will I touch your life; I will touch the lives of others through you.” In the time that remains, I’d like to explore two particular aspects of this calling from Jesus to each of us, and to all of us. First and foremost, it’s important to realize that it’s:

1. A call to put Jesus above everything else.

In his autobiography, the famous British poet John Betjamen describes how his father pressured him to carry on the family business. But young John had no desire to do so. He wanted to be a poet.

“That’s just a stupid dream,” said his father. “You’ve got to continue the family business not only so you can make a decent living for yourself, but more importantly, to uphold family honour and tradition. Our business has lasted three generations. You must make it four.”

But the young man refused, and followed his true sense of calling. John Betjamen would go on to become the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. He died in 1984, and is now memorialized in Westminster Abby.

I wonder how many generations of the Zebedee family had been fishing on the Sea of Galilee by the time Jesus called James and John to follow him. Chances are it was a lot more than four. In that place and time, small family businesses were often handed down for centuries. It was a safe, secure, and dependable way to make a living. But when Jesus calls the Zebedee brothers, they follow him at once, leaving their father and friends right there in the boat.

And before that, when Jesus called Simon and Andrew to follow him, what did they do? They left their nets behind, and followed. Jesus was calling them into the business of the Kingdom of God— the business of fishing for people. Since then, Jesus has handed his family business down to every generation of his disciples, including us. Because *how does Jesus touch lives?*

Through us!

In a traditional culture, like the one Jesus’ first disciples came from, you got your identity from your family. There are still many cultures like that— perhaps including your own cultural heritage. So, when Jesus says to you, like he said to James and John, “I want priority over your family,” it can seem so drastic.

For others of us who are more thoroughly influenced by Western individualistic culture, giving someone or something priority over our family might not seem like as much of a big deal. But then Jesus says, “By the way, I also want priority over your career.” To many of us, *that* is drastic. But it’s exactly what Jesus did when he asked his first disciples to step away from their fishing boats and nets, their livelihood. Put Jesus above my career? Put Jesus above the level of material lifestyle I’ve grown accustomed to, or that I

aspire to? That's a big ask. Be that as it may, Jesus calls us to put him first, without qualification, reservation, or apology. Why? Because he and he alone is the true King.

In fact, when Jesus called his first disciples to follow him, he did so in a way that was totally unique as far as Jewish tradition was concerned. Normally, pupils would choose their rabbis, not rabbis their pupils.

Back then, if you wanted to learn from a particular rabbi, you would go find and him, and say, "Rabbi, I would like to study with you. Will you take me as your disciple?" If the rabbi said yes, you were in. But remember, Mark is showing us that Jesus is the true King. Jesus has an authority infinitely beyond that of a typical rabbi.

You don't call this teacher; he calls you, and because of who he is, he rightly calls you to put him and his priorities above everything else in your life. Jesus calls you today, saying, "Knowing me, loving me, serving me, becoming like me, and letting me teach you how to reach and serve other people for the sake of my kingdom must become the passion of your life."

And who Jesus is warrants a response like that of Simon and Andrew, James and John, who abandoned life as they knew it in order to follow the true King, and join him in his healing, world-restoring mission. As author David Platt puts it:

In Jesus, these men found something worth losing everything for. In Christ, they encountered a love that surpassed comprehension, a satisfaction that superseded circumstances, and a purpose that transcended every other pursuit in this world. They eagerly, willingly and gladly lost their lives in order to know, follow, and proclaim him... Two thousand years later, I wonder how far we have wandered from this path. Somewhere along the way, amid varying cultural tides and popular church trends, it seems that we have minimized Jesus' summons to total abandonment. ²

Jesus' call is a summons to find our life by losing it, for his sake. If you say, "I'll follow and obey you, Jesus, *if* my career thrives, *if* I stay healthy, *if* my family life settles down, *if* you don't ask me to sacrifice too much, *if* you don't ask me to do anything that's hard," then, as Pastor Tim Keller writes:

The thing that's on the other side of that *if* is your real master, your real goal. But Jesus will not be a means to an end; he will not be used. If he calls you to follow him, *he* must be the goal. ³

Secondly, Jesus' call to you and me is:

2. A call to join and expand God's family.

We've seen how Jesus' first disciples didn't let anything stand in the way responding obediently to his call. This theme of ultimate allegiance to Jesus— even above allegiance to one's own family— continues throughout Mark's Gospel. In chapter 3 we read:

² David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*, p. 3-4.

³ Timothy Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in The Life of Jesus*, p. 19.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them. There was a crowd sitting around Jesus, and someone said, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he looked at those around him and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."⁴

Here Jesus is saying, "My true family consists of those who follow me— of my disciples." If you're a Christian, your core identity— *who you are*— is determined not by your family of origin (as important as that is) but by the fact that Jesus has called you into *God's* family.

Look around you at your other brothers and sisters in Christ. If you follow Jesus and are a part of his church, then *this* is where you are to find your ultimate sense of family identity. *This* is who you are.

Flip ahead to Mark chapter 10, and Peter points out to Jesus that he and the other disciples have left everything to follow him:

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields— along with persecutions— and in the age to come eternal life."⁵

I hope it goes without saying that Jesus is not calling us to literally abandon our families. What he's saying that our allegiance to him must supersede all other allegiances— even an allegiance as important as family. Of course, in some parts of the world, where becoming a Christian means being disowned by your family, people do face a very stark and literal choice in that regard when Jesus calls them to follow him.

In this passage, Jesus is saying that whatever we may have to leave behind when we choose to follow him, those losses will be offset a hundred times over with blessings, not just in the life to come, but also in this present life. These blessings come to us mainly in the form of people who belong to God's family— all of these wonderful spiritual brothers and sisters, mothers, fathers and children that we gain in Christ. To be part of this family of Jesus's disciples— provided you truly embrace and engage in it— is an unspeakable treasure, according to scripture.

Over the years, my own family has walked through a series of crises related to chronic health problems that our daughter has experienced. And let me tell you, I don't know what we would do without our church family that's been here to support us in so many ways. People have prayed for us, and with us. They have helped us practically, and at key points have offered us much-needed guidance with respect to our situation.

⁴ Mark 3:31-34 (NLT)

⁵ Mark 10:29-30 (NIV)

There are times I can remember thinking, “God, how do people get through things like this without Jesus? How do they get by without being part of God’s family, the church?” Because for the life of me, I don’t get how they do. Throughout my life as a Christian, I would not hesitate for even a millisecond to say that my life has been richer and better by more than a hundredfold, because I get to be part of Jesus’ family, God’s family, the church.

So, in calling you to follow him, Jesus calls you into God’s family, the church.

And at the very same time, Jesus calls you to expand God’s family by contributing to the church’s mission. Because *how does Jesus touch lives?*

Through us!

Going back to Mark chapter 3, notice what Jesus says in verse 35:

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”⁶

According to this verse, membership in Jesus’ family is open to who? It’s open to anyone. Jesus’ family is open to *whoever* does God will, to *whoever* says yes to Jesus’ call to follow him.

New Testament scholars explain that Mark often highlights Jesus’ use of the word “whoever” as a way of signaling to his readers in every era of history that Jesus wants his family to grow. The circle of his disciples is to be an ever-widening circle, and those of us who are already part of that circle are to be active in expanding it.

I came across an article that tells the story of Eric and Jaci Hasemeyer, who over the years have opened their home to over 30 foster kids, and personally adopted 9 of them.⁷ They explain that, “Our philosophy has always been that if a child is not returned to his or her parents or relatives or moved elsewhere by the court, then our home would be their final stop, their forever home.” There’s always room for another kid to become part of the Hasemeyer family.

Immeasurably more so, there’s always room for another— for anyone— *whoever*— to join God’s family by becoming a follower of Jesus. Jesus’ call is open to all. And those who follow him— including you and me— are called to “fish for people” as it were, so that others may also join God’s family.

Bible scholars tell us that when Jesus says, “Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, and sister, and mother,” he’s essentially calling you and me to be disciples who work together make other disciples. Because *how does Jesus touch lives?*

Through us!

That’s how God’s family grows, and that’s how God’s Kingdom spreads throughout the world.

⁶ Mark 3:35 (NIV)

⁷ <https://gimundo.com/news/article/jaci-and-eric-hasemeyer-inspire-50-adoptions-in-one-neighborhood/>

Jesus wants to expand his family, and calls you and me to play our part in making it so. *Will you answer the call?*

It's a call to put Jesus and his priorities—his mission— first. *Will you answer the call?*

It's a call to team up and work together, like a fishing crew on a boat, except Jesus calls us to fish for people. *Will you answer the call?*

It's a call to contribute to the disciple-making mission of this local church by serving here at Cornerstone in a way that suits the gifts and capacities God has given you. *Will you answer the call?*

We'd like to give you a special opportunity to do so now.

This Sunday and next are Ministry Fair Sundays here at Cornerstone. On each of these Sundays, we give you space to listen to how God may be inviting you to join the mission of this local church by serving in a ministry role that suits you.

A card has been placed on each chair today. It says, "Current Serving Opportunities." Would everyone grab that card please?

Listed on this card are a variety of opportunities that are available for serving here at Cornerstone. In just a moment, we'll give you a quiet space to prayerfully reflect on and fill that card out as the Lord leads you.

But first, there are two ministries that we especially want to highlight this year— our Worship Ministry and Children's Ministry. Maybe God would call you to serve in one of these ministries, so let me say a little about each:

- **Worship Ministry** encompasses so much more than the musicians you see on stage. There are as many as 10 different teams that work together to shape our Sunday worship services. A few of those teams are more visible and up-front, and others are more behind-the-scenes.

Kristy Bhagat, our Worship Director, says that if you have either musical, technical or administrative skills, there may well be a role for you in Cornerstone's Worship Ministry.

She also adds that those who serve in Cornerstone's Worship Ministry not only have lots of fun together, but many have found rich and meaningful community with each other in Jesus, sometimes in surprising and wonderful ways.

- **Children's Ministry** is about so much more than babysitting on a Sunday morning.

Annie Pau, our Children's Ministry Director, emphasizes that there is lots of learning that happens in Children's Ministry, and not just for the kids, but also for the adults who serve them.

It's space for curiosity, exploration, discovery and fun, where you can grow in Jesus yourself, even as you experience the sacred privilege of being part of helping children encounter Jesus and grow in their faith.

Just like in Worship Ministry, in StarKids ministry, there are also 10 teams that serve in different capacities. Of course, there are plenty of opportunities to work directly with children on Sundays, but there are also midweek opportunities to help with administrative tasks. And if you happen to have experience working with children who have exceptionalities, that would be a significant asset to the StarKids team.

After service, you will find both Kristy and Annie, along with members of their teams, at booths in the lobby. They will have info available, and will be happy to answer any questions you may have about Worship or Children's Ministry.

In the lobby you will also find our brand-new **Serve Wall**. It will be there year-round, and it will be your go-to place to find out more information about current serving opportunities here at Cornerstone.

So after service today, you can visit the Worship and Children's Ministry booths if you like, and check out the Serve Wall.

But at this time, I invite you to take your Current Serving Opportunities card, and flip it over to the side where it says, "Areas of Need" at the top. There, you will find a wide range of current service opportunities listed across a number of Cornerstone's ministries. For those of you who are worshipping online, there web page where you will find current serving opportunities:

www.cornerstonechurch.ca/serve.

I invite you to grab a pen from one of the seat pouches. Or, you can get one from one of the ushers who are making their way around the worship hall with extra pens.

I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to sit with this card. As you look it over, ask Jesus, "Lord, is there any particular area of service that you're calling me to?" Then, check off the opportunities on the card that you feel most drawn to.

And let me be clear: In checking any box, you're not committing to serve in that ministry. Rather, you are simply saying that you're interested in possibly serving in that area, and are willing to have someone in that ministry area follow up with you and give you more information.

Last but not least, please don't forget to write in your name and contact information on the bottom of the card.

Please take a couple of minutes now to prayerfully fill out those cards, and afterwards, when the offering goes around, you'll have the chance to put your completed cards in the offering bag.