

Week 2 - Mark 1:16-45

FORMERLY
KNOWN AS
CHRISTIAN

Do you ever wonder why the first disciples began following Jesus? Up to this point in the story, there hasn't been a whole lot of excitement surrounding him, nor did he give a particularly inspiring reason for them to drop everything at a moment's notice. Why would a few humble fishermen abandon their boats and their families to follow some carpenter from Nazareth? Nonetheless, Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John all did just that. Perhaps they had known Jesus for some time already, or were even his friends. Perhaps they had heard him preach about the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps they were simply discontented with their current lives.

This is all mostly speculation. What we do know from Mark's account is that Jesus had not done anything miraculous yet. He had not healed anyone; he had not cast out any demons; he didn't walk out to their boats on the surface of the water. And yet, these four men accepted Jesus' call.

Certainly, they were glad that they did, though Jesus would take them to places and introduce them to circumstances that were wild and uncomfortable, even by ancient expectations of the supernatural.

When Jesus and his four disciples come to Capernaum, Jesus begins to teach in the Synagogue.¹ This is a normal enough practice, though Jesus is recognized as speaking with authority, unlike the local religious leaders. Jesus didn't speak in hypotheticals or "maybes," but with power and truth. This authority is not only *heard* but is immediately *witnessed* by the crowd as Jesus drives away an evil² spirit. "Even evil spirits obey his orders!" This event is followed by a string of miraculous events, which serve to establish the fact that Jesus has authority over all the earth: over demons, illness, uncleanness, and all other manifestations of brokenness.

It's no wonder Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John followed Jesus. When he said to them, "Come, follow me," they recognized the authority in his voice and could do nothing but listen and obey. Such is true of all those who seek to follow Jesus. We recognize the authority of our Lord and, when called, we follow him into the depths of brokenness. Jesus doesn't just invite us to witness his miracles, he *calls* us to be active participants in reconciling all things back to God.³ In Christ, we are granted authority over the darkness, in order that we might be the light of the world.

Questions for discussion/reflection:

1. If you have decided to follow Jesus, what was your original reason? If it has been a while, has your reason changed? If you have not, what is keeping you from doing so?
2. Where do you need to submit to the authority of Jesus in your own life? To what broken place is Jesus calling you to join him in healing?
3. Do you recognize yourself as having been granted authority in Christ? If so, how have you used this authority to advance the Kingdom of God?

¹ Synagogues developed as places where Jews could gather to worship, to hear the Scriptures read and explained, and even to conduct business. The Synagogue was especially important for Jews who lived far from Jerusalem, because it was more difficult to be an active part of the life of the Temple. Jesus, as a 1st century Jew, would be accustomed to going to his local Synagogue on the Sabbath and perhaps throughout the week.

² The Greek word translated "evil" (akathartos) is perhaps better translated as "unclean." Its usage can be both ceremonial (unclean according to Levitical/Jewish law) and moral (evil). The same root (katharos) is used by the man with leprosy, as he pleads for Jesus to make him "clean" (Mark 1:40). Ceremonial cleanliness was incredibly important to 1st century Jews. Therefore, as unclean, both the demoniac and the leper would have been cut off from public engagement and from most relationships. Jesus doesn't just heal the sickness or send away the darkness. He also reconciles broken and alienated people back to their communities.

³ Think "6 Broken Places"