

Picking A Team

Mark 1:16-20

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Most of us have had the experience of watching teams get picked, maybe in PE class or with a group of friends. We often pick teams before playing games at youth group. Usually, the team captains pick the people they think will be the best players first, and the players they think will be the least help to the team last. I have found that as the years go on, my desirability as a pick seems to go down. The kids have discovered that my ability to dodge balls has decreased dramatically as I've gotten older. So I'm not usually picked early anymore.

Most of us have probably had the experience of standing around waiting to be picked, watching others getting picked for a team ahead of us. That experience isn't just unique to dodgeball or PE, however. Even as adults, we often have the experience of feeling like other people are far more desirable than we are. We see potential mates pick our friends before us, co-workers get entrusted with responsibility before us, or sit alone at a table for a long time until people sit with you because there's nowhere left to sit. These experiences can convince us that we are basically worthless, and unable to play a significant role anywhere.

As we work through our passage this morning, I hope you'll see yourself through a different lens. Today we look at Jesus picking the first members of His team, but they are not the kind of people you would expect Him to pick. Jesus seemed to pick the nobodies, the people often overlooked by the world, as the people He would use to change the world. Jesus can use us to do great things for Him, we just have to be willing to answer His call.

Jesus' First Picks

Mark's account of this event is once again quite brief, but it still gives us a lot to consider.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ¹⁸ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

¹⁹ A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. ²⁰ He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men. (Mark 1:16-20, NLT)

Mark says Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee when He called his first disciples. The Sea of Galilee was a fairly large body of water and it supported many people in the region through fishing. The Sea of Galilee would have been a familiar place to the people of the region, because it was at the center of many people's

livelihoods. Many of the stories we read about Jesus take place on or around the Sea of Galilee. Mark's readers would likely have been able to picture the setting well.

As Jesus was walking, we are told he saw Simon (later called Peter) and his brother Andrew and He called them to follow Him. A little way up the shore Jesus called two more brothers, James and John (who were business partners of Simon and Andrew and were working with their father, Zebedee) to be His followers.

Nothing against fishermen, but it seems a little strange to us that Jesus's first 4 picks for his team were fishermen. Generally speaking, you probably would have expected Jesus to pick people who were well-educated, skilled in public speaking, winsome and persuasive, popular, and other such things. But those weren't the qualities that Jesus was seeking out. We aren't told exactly why Jesus chose the men He did, but we do know these men probably would not have been our first choice.

The Lord has a pattern of picking unexpected people to use. After King Saul, who looked exactly like you would expect a king to look, God anointed David as the next king. Everyone overlooked David because he didn't look the part, but God said He was more concerned with what was inside than outside. God chose Gideon to lead the Israelites to victory even though when God called Gideon he was hiding and not exactly the confident leader you would expect. Many of God's prophets were people you wouldn't expect God to choose as His messengers.

I don't know about you, but I find great encouragement in this. Maybe you're the kind of person who expects they should be picked first for everything, but I generally don't think of myself that way. I suspect most of us look at the people around us and we see all the skills they have that we don't. We feel unworthy for God to pick us for anything, and assume that God would never use us.

The example of Jesus picking these 4 fishermen as His first disciples should remind us that God can use anyone who is willing. As a matter of fact, I think God delights in using the most surprising people to do His greatest works. If you fast forward to the day of Pentecost, after Jesus had been crucified, risen from the grave, and ascended into Heaven, this same fisherman (Peter) stood up in front of a crowd and preached and thousands came to faith. Later, he and John healed a crippled man and began preaching in the temple. When the religious leaders called them and questioned them, Peter and John preached to the leaders as well! Listen to how the leaders responded,

¹³ The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13, NLT)

The leaders marveled because Peter and John were nobodies. They had no explanation for the power of their preaching other than the fact that they had been with Jesus. God was working through them, even though they were "ordinary men with no special training". You may consider yourself to be an ordinary person with no special

training, but I hope you see God can use you too. It doesn't matter what skills you bring to the table, it doesn't matter how confident you feel. If you will do what God calls you to do, He will use you.

Their Response

If Jesus' choices for His first team members were surprising, perhaps more surprising is the response we see from these men. Mark tells us they left their nets at once and followed Him. Peter and Andrew seem to have left their nets and their boat behind and followed Jesus. John and James left their boat, their nets, and their dad behind!

The other gospels help to give us a bit more background about what happened. In John's gospel, we learn that Andrew had been one of John's disciples. John had pointed Jesus out to him and told him that Jesus was the Lamb of God. So, this certainly wasn't Andrew's first experience with Jesus. We are told he had even brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus as well.

In Luke's gospel, we are told that Jesus performed a great miracle with Simon and Andrew before He called them to follow Him. Simon and Andrew had been fishing all night but had caught nothing. Jesus asked to use their boat to preach to people on the shore. After He finished, Jesus told Simon to take the boat into deeper water and let down his nets to catch some fish. Simon, probably a bit annoyed with getting fishing tips from a non-fisherman, initially resisted, but then did what Jesus said. Suddenly, they ended up with so many fish in their nets that the nets began to tear. They called over James and John for help, and as they got the fish in the boat there were so many that they were on the verge of sinking! It is after this that Jesus issued his call to these men to follow Him.

After hearing these stories, we can understand a bit more why Simon, Andrew, James, and John responded as they did. So why didn't Mark include these details? I suspect it's because Mark's focus was not on why these men responded as they did, but that he wanted to focus on the fact that they responded with great faith. Though the other aspects of the story are fascinating, Mark doesn't want his readers to lose sight of the significant response of these simple fishermen.

These four men had an amazing experience, but what Jesus was asking them to do was still not easy. Even after hearing Him teach and seeing a miracle, they could still come up with many reasons they couldn't follow Jesus. They could have reasoned that they couldn't leave their business, and that maybe they'd be able to follow Him if they sold it and got a good price for it. Or they could have said they couldn't leave their families. Surely Zebedee needed his sons to help run the fishing business. They could have argued that Dad's not getting any younger, so we really need to be here. And they could have even argued that it just sounded unknown and scary, and the wiser course of action was to stay with what they knew and was established. They had no guarantees in following Jesus. But they were confident He was the Messiah, so they were willing to follow, no matter the cost.

How often do we miss out on some of God's greatest blessings because we are scared to follow Him? We are great at coming up with excuses why we can't do some of the things the Lord asks of us,

- It's not a good time. I've got too much to do, too many ballgames, too much work, too many other things we'd rather do right now. When things slow down, then I'll make time to follow.
- We're tired. I've done what He asked of me before, but now it's someone else's turn to follow Him. I've fulfilled my duty.
- We feel inadequate. God surely doesn't really want someone like me, because I'm messed up, I don't know enough, and I'm not confident I can do what He's asked.
- We're scared. Often we are afraid of what following the Lord might cost, and quite frankly, we're scared it might not be worth the trade.

I hope you see that these men may not have had the kind of qualifications we would have looked for, but they had the most important one—they were willing to trust Jesus enough to follow Him, even though it would be hard. My challenge to you is to take a step of faith and follow the Lord wherever He's asking you to go. It may not be a step as big as the disciples, but it may be something that feels like a big step for you. If you feel the Lord's leading, follow Him. If you do, you'll get a front row seat to what He is doing.

Their New Calling

Jesus called these men to follow Him and they did. Then He told them He was going to change their vocation. Instead of being fishermen, they would be fishers of men. It's important to note that Jesus said He would teach them to be fishers of men. He didn't expect them to already know how to do what He was asking of them.

Jesus' disciples learned about how to fish for people by following Him. I often wonder what life was like for these disciples. I suspect Jesus spent less time holding classes with the disciples and more time simply modeling what this kind of ministry looked like. The best way for us to become like Jesus is to spend time with Him. We may not be able to walk across the countryside with the man Jesus like the disciples did, but we can still have a relationship with Him that is vibrant and life-changing, just as they did. We can study the scriptures and watch how Jesus interacted with people, we can see what He valued, and we can be challenged to live as He did. In that sense, we too can walk with Jesus.

It's interesting to me that Jesus tells them that they'll still be fishing, they'll just be fishing for something different. Jesus used their current vocation as a means of helping them understand the task He had for them. The task of taking the gospel to the world carries with it some distinct similarities with the task of fishing. Chief among them is that fishermen don't get to just put out a sign directing fish to get into the net. They have to go where the fish are and catch them.

I'm not a very good fisherman at all, but I've had conversations with guys who were very good fishermen. What I've learned from them is that you have to go find the fish,

because they aren't going to come to you. You've got to know what the fish want if you have any chance of catching them.

The same is true in fishing for people. Rarely will people come knocking on your door and asking you how they can trust in Jesus. It happens, but it's not common. The far more common course of action is that people spend time getting to know their friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, or the parents who have kids the same age as yours. When we go to them and start building bridges and start finding ways to just bring up faith with them, that's when the greatest opportunities to share tend to come.

Most people think they have nothing to offer the Lord. They recognize they have certain skills, but don't see how they could possibly be used by God. Jesus used these fishermen, took the skills they had, and used them to do far more than they would have dared imagine. Don't underestimate how God can use your skills, whatever they may be, if you'll offer them to Him in ministry, He will use them.

As most of you know, I planned to be a doctor when I grew up (clearly, that didn't happen though!) I went to a state college and spent four years studying biology and chemistry from professors who were hostile to Christianity. At the end of that time, I felt the Lord was leading me into ministry rather than medicine. The education I received sure doesn't seem like it would be beneficial to a minister. Most pastoral search committees do not have "Degree in Biology" listed as one of the desirable traits. So it would have been tempting to think that the four years I spent preparing for medical school was wasted, since I was going in a different direction, but I have found that the Lord has many ways for me to use the things I learned in college to serve Him in ministry. I learned how to defend my faith and think critically. My science background enables me to reach people others wouldn't be able to.

You may feel that the skills or aptitudes you have are of little value to the Lord, but you'd be amazed how He can use them if you'll commit them to Him.

- You may have excellent organizational skills and can put together teams that can do effective ministry together.
- Maybe you're great at making conversation with others, so you can connect with people and point them to Jesus.
- Maybe you are skilled at building or repairing things, and can use that as an opening to point people to Christ's love as you meet genuine needs in the lives of others.
- Maybe you're great at teaching other people, so you can take time to disciple someone in the faith.
- Maybe you can cook well, so you can demonstrate Christ's love and open doors to ministry by providing food to friends, neighbors, and other believers.
- Maybe you are a dedicated prayer warrior, who can bathe both your ministry and the ministry of others in prayer and pray for those who need to know Christ.
- Maybe you're great with kids, so you can minister to children and in so doing, open doors to minister to their parents as well.

My point is this: God will use the skills you have to enable you to serve Him. You may not be qualified to do the job God has called someone else to do, but you are qualified to do the job He has for you. Your experience in other areas of life is not wasted—you just need to look for how your skills can serve the Lord. That's what Jesus did with these fishermen, and that's what He'll do for you as well.

Conclusion

This is another brief description of a famous event in the ministry of Jesus. Once again, I think Mark chooses not to include some of the details so we focus more closely on what he wants us to see. As such, I've got a couple of applications for us.

First, Jesus has a spot for you on His team. You may feel like the last-picked in everything else, and thus think you have nothing to offer the Lord, but He doesn't evaluate people the way the world does. Jesus sees deeper into us. Instead of seeing only our failures and the areas of our weakness, He sees our strengths and our potential. He sees ways to use our failures and mistakes for His glory. This passage reminds us that God often uses the people who seem least likely—because in so doing, He shows His own glory.

Second, the Lord has a job for you to do. He told the disciples they would become fishers of men. The job description for us is the same, even though what that looks like for each of us will be different. He calls us to reach out to the world around us and point them to Jesus. Just like fishermen, our catch is likely not going to jump in the boat with us. We've got to go get them. So find ways to go into the world around you and bring people to Jesus. You don't have to change people's hearts, that God's job, but you do need to bring people to Him. Your unique set of skills qualifies you to minister in a way no one else can, so use them!

Third, Jesus calls you and me to follow Him. Jesus called the disciples, and they left everything they knew to follow Him. I suspect most of us would struggle with that decision. The Lord calls you into a relationship with Him, one that will challenge you and stretch you. It will almost certainly require sacrifice on your part, but the payoff will be worth it. Jesus' disciples gave up being fishermen in a small community in Galilee, which was all they'd ever known. But Jesus used them to change the world. They traveled far and wide and saw God working through them firsthand. Let me challenge you to ask yourself what God is calling you to do and what's holding you back from doing it. Take a lesson from these four disciples and recognize that the sacrifices you make for the Lord will be absolutely worth it in the end.

I hope you find both encouragement and challenge in this passage. The guys Jesus called were probably not that much different than you or I. The Lord does extraordinary things through ordinary people. At the same time, I suspect we are often held back by our own unwillingness to follow. This passage reminds us that the Lord can use you to make an eternal impact, if we will trust Him enough to truly follow Him.

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