

Mark 1: 14-20

A PROFESSOR COMMUNICATIONS RECENTLY SAID SOMETHING ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE AND HOW BOTH ARE AFFECTED BY TECHNOLOGY. "TECHNOLOGY CHANGES BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR CHANGES ATTITUDES."

FOR EXAMPLE, EDISON INVENTED THE LIGHT BULB, PEOPLE STARTED STAYING UP LONGER INTO THE NIGHT, AND NOW WE EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO WORK OR PLAY EVEN WHEN IT IS PITCH DARK OUTSIDE. THE DARKNESS NO LONGER LIMITS US. OR CONSIDER THE CELL PHONE. THE FACT THAT WE CAN OFTEN KNOW WHO IS CALLING BECAUSE OF CALLER ID AND THE FACT THAT WE KNOW A MESSAGE CAN BE LEFT BECAUSE OF VOICE MAIL GIVES US CONTROL OVER WHOM WE TALK WITH AND WHEN WE CHOOSE TO TAKE A CALL, BASED ON OUR CONVENIENCE AND BASED ON THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WE CAN LISTEN TO A VOICE-MAIL MESSAGE AT SOME LATER TIME, A TIME OF OUR CHOOSING. IT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE DAYS WHEN WE PICKED UP A PHONE WITHOUT ANY IDEA WHO MIGHT BE ON THE OTHER END OF THE CALL.

I REMEMBER WHEN OUR KIDS WERE ALL IN THEIR 20'S AND I KNEW THEIR PHONES WERE ALWAYS IN THEIR HANDS BUT IT SEEMED WHENEVER I CALLED THEY NEVER ANSWERED. IT WAS AS THOUGH THEY SAW "MOM" WAS CALLING AND THEY WERE SUDDENLY BUSY.

TECHNOLOGY CHANGES BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR CHANGES ATTITUDES. AND SO I WONDER. I WONDER HOW OUR SPIRITUALITY HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY TECHNOLOGY. WITH SO MUCH CONTROL AFFORDED US, ARE WE STILL ABLE TO BE OPEN TO GOD'S TIMING, TO GOD'S SURPRISE IN-BREAKING INTO OUR LIVES, TO GOD'S CALLS? THE TENSION BETWEEN CONTROL OF OUR OWN LIVES AND TURNING OURSELVES OVER TO GOD'S WILL FOR US HAS BEEN A LONG-STANDING HUMAN PROBLEM, BUT HAS IT BECOME EVEN MORE OF A PROBLEM NOW, GIVEN OUR TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES AND THE CONTROL WE HAVE? IS IT EVEN HARDER THAN IT ONCE WAS TO CONCEIVE OF OURSELVES DROPPING EVERYTHING AND RESPONDING TO JESUS IMMEDIATELY? ARE WE EVEN MORE LIKELY TO PUT OFF TAKING THE CALL, TO WAIT UNTIL WE HAVE ENOUGH TIME, TO SUSPECT THAT THE CALLER HAS NOTHING IMPORTANT TO SAY SO WHY BOTHER, TO DISMISS THE CALL ALTOGETHER BECAUSE WE DON'T BELIEVE WE'LL BE ABLE TO DO WHAT THE CALLER IS ASKING OF US?

WHENEVER I'VE READ THIS STORY FROM MARK ABOUT JESUS CALLING THE DISCIPLES AND IMAGINE THEIR INSTANTANEOUS DROPPING OF EVERYTHING---THEIR NETS, THEIR LIVELIHOOD, EVERYTHING---AND THEIR TAKING OFF AFTER JESUS, I IMAGINE IT AS SORT OF A PIED PIPER SCENE. SOMETHING THAT COULD HAPPEN LONG AGO. THERE'S AN UNREALITY TO IT FOR ME. I THINK OF THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM I WOULD HAVE TO TALK OVER WHAT JESUS HAD ASKED ME TO DO BEFORE I COULD JUST LEAVE. I THINK OF THE PLANS AND PREPARATIONS I HAVE TO MAKE JUST TO TAKE A FEW DAYS OFF FROM WORK...CAN'T

IMAGINE JUST DROPPING EVERYTHING RIGHT THEN AND THERE TO FOLLOW JESUS. TO SEE THESE MEN JUST GET UP AND LEAVE THEIR WORK SEEMS LUDICROUS TO ME. AND SO I DISTANCE MYSELF FROM THE TEXT, WHICH IS WHAT I THINK MOST OF US DO. WE KNOW WE CAN'T JUST WALK AWAY FROM OUR HOMES, OUR FAMILIES AND OUR JOBS AS INSTANTLY AS THESE MEN DO.

BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR SUGGESTS THAT WE'RE MISSING THE POINT IF WE LINGER ON OUR OWN QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THESE MEN COULD HAVE SO INSTANTLY DROPPED EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED JESUS---OR IF WE LINGER ON OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER WE COULD DO THE SAME. SHE WRITES, "THIS IS A STORY ABOUT JESUS, NOT THE DISCIPLES OR US". TO FOCUS ON WHAT THE DISCIPLES GAVE UP AND WHETHER WE COULD DO THE SAME IS "TO PUT THE ACCENT ON THE WRONG SYLLABLE." THIS "MIRACLE STORY," AS SHE CALLS IT, IS REALLY ABOUT THE POWER OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST....TO WALK RIGHT UP TO A QUARTET OF FISHERMEN AND WORK A MIRACLE, CREATING FAITH WHERE THERE WAS NO FAITH, CREATING DISCIPLES WHERE THERE WERE NONE JUST A MOMENT BEFORE."

WE'VE BECOME SO INDEPENDENT, SEEMINGLY SO MUCH MORE IN CONTROL OF OUR LIVES AND OUR TIME, WE MAY HAVE LOST SOMETHING. WE MAY HAVE LOST A SENSE OF THE FULLNESS OF THE POWER OF GOD---THE POWER OF JESUS TO RECRUIT PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE TERRIBLE CHOICES; THE POWER OF JESUS TO SNEAK UP ON PEOPLE WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT OTHER THINGS, NOT GOD, AND SURPRISE THEM WITH GLORY.

THIS STORY IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT US BUT MORE ABOUT GOD; ABOUT GOD'S POWER AND JESUS' WAY OF WORKING. SO NOTICE SOME THINGS ABOUT THE STORY. NOTICE WHO THE MEN WERE THAT JESUS CALLED. THESE FISHERMEN DID NOT COME FROM IVY LEAGUE SCHOOLS; THEY DID NOT HAVE THEIR DOCTORATES IN THEOLOGY; THEY WERE NOT WEALTHY. THEY WERE ORDINARY PEOPLE. THEY WERE ORDINARY PEOPLE WITH ORDINARY LIVES AND WITH ORDINARY RESPONSIBILITIES. WILLIAM BARCLAY SAYS, "IT WAS AS IF JESUS SAID, 'GIVE ME TWELVE ORDINARY PEOPLE AND WITH THEM, IF THEY WILL GIVE THEMSELVES TO ME, I WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.'" GOD WAS BUILDING A TEAM AND STILL IS. THAT IS NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE. BARCLAY SAYS, "NO ONE EVER BELIEVED IN THE ORDINARY PERSON AS MUCH AS JESUS DID." THIS STORY FROM MARK IS ABOUT THE POWER OF JESUS TO CHANGE THE WORLD WITH ORDINARY PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND LIKE ME.

BUT THEN, WE DON'T THINK THAT ANYTHING WE CAN DO HAS THE POWER TO HAVE MUCH IMPACT IN THE WORLD, DO WE? CHANGE THE WORLD? US? WITH ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT EXIST? WITH WARS RAGING AND INJUSTICES EVERYWHERE AND LONG-HELD ANIMOSITIES BETWEEN GROUPS OF PEOPLE, WHAT CAN WE POSSIBLY DO? THOSE DOUBTS NAG AT US, AND AGAIN WE GET HUNG UP WITH OURSELVES RATHER THAN TRUSTING THE POWER OF CHRIST.

I WAS BLESSED TO HAVE A RETIRED COUPLE, RICK AND LARAYNE WAHLSTROM, SERVE AS CONFIRMATION MENTORS AND CO-TEACHERS YEARS AGO AND I WILL NEVER FORGET THE STORY THEY SHARED ONE NIGHT WITH OUR 8TH GRADERS. RICK AND LARAYNE WERE IN AN AIRPORT GATE AREA WAITING FOR A FLIGHT TO ARRIVE AS IT WOULD BE THE SAME PLANE THAT WOULD TAKE THEM TO THEIR DESTINATION. AS THEY SAT WAITING A WOMAN CAME AND SAT BESIDE LARAYNE AND SAID, "EXCUSE ME, BUT I NOTICED YOU'RE WEARING A CROSS NECKLACE AND I WAS WONDERING IF YOU WOULD PRAY FOR MY ME AND MY HUSBAND. WE ARE WAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE PLANE THAT IS CARRYING THE CASKET AND BODY OF OUR SON WHO WAS TRAGICALLY KILLED IN A MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENT. RIGHT THEN AND THERE LARAYNE TOOK THE MOTHER'S HAND AND PRAYED ALOUD AT THEIR GATE AREA. DID LARAYNE'S SINGLE PRAYER WITH A STRANGER INSTANTLY TAKE AWAY HER GRIEF? NO. BUT AS LARAYNE SHARED WITH OUR CONFIRMATION STUDENTS, SHE BELIEVED THE MOTHER'S REQUEST AND HER PRAYER MADE ANOTHER FAMILY IN CRISIS KNOW THAT GOD WAS HOLDING THEM, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THEIR SUFFERING. IN THAT VERY SHORT MOMENT IN TIME, LARAYNE WAS ALIGNING HER LIFE WITH GOD'S VISION FOR THE WORLD. AND THE MOTHER WHO APPROACHED LARAYNE FOR PRAYER...A COMPLETE STRANGER... A STEP THAT TOOK COURAGE AND VULNERABILITY....SHE TOO WAS ALIGNING HER LIFE WITH GOD'S VISION FOR THE WORLD. A TURNING TOWARD GOD TOOK PLACE.

WHEN JESUS ASKED THOSE FISHERMEN TO FOLLOW HIM, HE DID NOT SAY TO THEM, "I HAVE A THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM THAT I WOULD LIKE YOU TO INVESTIGATE." HE DID NOT SAY, "I HAVE CERTAIN THEORIES THAT I WOULD LIKE YOU TO THINK OVER AND GET BACK TO ME." HE DID NOT SAY, "I HAVE AN ETHICAL SYSTEM I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU WHEN YOU HAVE A MINUTE." HE SIMPLY SAID, "FOLLOW ME." WILLIAM BARCLAY SAYS, "IT ALL BEGAN WITH A PERSONAL REACTION TO JESUS. IT ALL BEGAN IN A TUG ON THE HEART." JESUS DOESN'T ASK THE FISHERMEN TO "ADD ONE MORE TASK TO THEIR BUSY LIVES. HE CALLS THEM INTO A NEW WAY OF BEING." HE DOESN'T GIVE THEM A NEW LIST OF THINGS TO DO BUT A "NEW IDENTITY---A WHOLE NEW LIFE. THAT'S WHAT THEY TURN TO IN A MOMENT. A WHOLE NEW LIFE LIVED AS BEST AS IS POSSIBLE IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE WILL OF GOD.

JESUS CALLED THOSE ORDINARY FISHERMEN TO A MOVEMENT, TO JOIN A REVOLUTION THAT IS STILL GOING ON, A REVOLUTION THAT INVOLVES STANDING FOR LOVE RATHER THAN HATE, STANDING FOR INVOLVEMENT RATHER THAN LACK OF ENGAGEMENT, STANDING FOR PURPOSE RATHER THAN FOR HUMDRUM DAYS.

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO WAKE UP EVERY MORNING BELIEVING YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TURN AGAIN TO FOLLOW---TO BE USED BY CHRIST IN SOME WAY EACH AND EVERY DAY? WHAT A WAY TO WAKE UP! WITH THE ANTICIPATION THAT SOMEHOW,

SOMETIME, IN SOME WAY DURING THAT DAY, GOD MIGHT USE YOU, AND YOU MAY KNOW IT OR MAYBE YOU WON'T.

FOLLOWING JESUS IS THE ONGOING PROCESS OF TURNING OUR LIVES IN THE SAME DIRECTION AS GOD'S, AND SOMETIMES THAT MEANS DOING THE SAME THINGS WE ALWAYS DO BUT DOING THEM IN A NEW WAY FOR NEW REASONS. FOLLOWING JESUS IS TO CLAIM OUR IDENTITIES...OUR VERY IDENTITIES AS CHILDREN OF GOD AND TO LIVE FAITHFUL TO SUCH A CALLING. MAY WE ANSWER YES TO THE CALL ANEW THIS DAY...REDIRECTING OURSELVES TO CHRIST'S WAY. AMEN.