

**Sermon FINAL**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**January 21, 2018**  
**Mark 1:14-20**

Last weekend, in Hawaii, as many of you know, there was a false alarm about a missile being launched and heading to the Islands. Everyone, residents and visitors alike, received a warning on their cell phones, telling them to take cover. And for 38 long minutes, no one corrected the false alarm. And so people had to prepare for potential annihilation. They were forced to look at their death in face. Cell phone lines were jammed so people sent text messages to their loved ones. I heard a couple on CBC describe how they opened their hearts and talked about their life together, giving thanks for all their blessings. Some people are still angry about the sloppy way the situation was handled, and that it happened at all. Some people have been traumatized. Others talk about how it opened their eyes to the situation of their lives. And have made decisions to change.

In today's Gospel reading from Mark we hear the story of two sets of brothers, shaken to the core, but in a different way. Just like the people in Hawaii last week, it was a normal day by any account. The brothers, Simon and Andrew, and James and John were fishermen, and they were starting their day by the lake's edge, two mending their nets and the other two casting their nets, when Jesus approached and said, "Repent, and believe in the good news!" Mark tells us that they "immediately left their nets and followed him." In other words, they left all that was familiar to them - their livelihood,

their place in the community, their families, and went to follow Jesus without knowing where they were being asked to go. But trusting, somehow, the person inviting them. Trusting, on a very deep and intuitive level.

When we look at the nets in our own lives; what catches us up and prevents us from fully following Jesus? What makes it difficult for us to trust and move on? Is it regret, guilt, shame, low self-worth, or our grudges towards others - our anger, fear, our judgments?

The word “repent” means to turn. To go in different direction. For the disciples in today’s reading, it meant *turning towards* a new way, a new life. We heard this word also in our first reading from the Hebrew Bible. For the people of Nineveh who Jonah went to warn, they *turned away* from their evil ways. They repented. In this case, the people *turned back* towards God. They gave up the evil ways that put a wedge in between themselves and God. In both cases, the turning is always towards right relationship with God; to receive the blessings we are being offered and to pass them on. There is movement, flow, and growth in repentance.

Often it takes us getting shaken up to acknowledge where we’re stuck, where we’re rigid and unmoving. We might feel so comfortable in our daily routines that we don’t want to change. And when we are unhappy, it’s easier to focus on other people and what we don’t like about them, or what they’re doing, than to admit our own unwillingness to change, take responsibility for our own lives, and to turn to God with our needs.

I think of Frank. I was in an “encounter group” with Frank when I was in my early twenties. Frank seemed old to me; he was in his thirties and he still lived with his mother. Frank had haemophilia, a condition where your blood doesn’t clot and so even a slight cut or bruise can become life threatening.

For weeks I heard Frank complain about his mother. How overbearing and controlling and fearful she was.

Then one day, the group leader asked if he would be willing to do an exercise. He agreed. I was asked to role-play Frank’s mother. We stood facing each other. We were asked to hold hands. I reached out and took Frank’s hands. Then Frank began to tell me all the things he resented about “our” relationship. The counsellor asked him, “So what do you want to ask your mother to do, Frank?” and Frank said to me, “Just trust me, and let me go, Mom. I’ll be fine.” So I let go of Frank’s hands. And what happened next was totally fascinating. I looked down, and Frank was grasping my hands so tightly that my fingers were turning white and I was losing feeling in them. I said, “Let go of me, Frank,” and he shouted at me, “No, **you** let go of me, Mom.” The group leader intervened and drew Frank’s attention to his hands and what he was doing. He just couldn’t or wouldn’t let go.

The only person we can change is ourselves, with God’s grace. And when we really know that and own that, we can be free from whatever entraps us, ensnares us, binds us. And the good news we are being asked to believe, is that when we decide to change, and follow the One who promises and provides new life, we are never alone. There are well-established footsteps to follow. We have faithful

people throughout the ages who have shown us how to live, how to give, how to surrender and how to embrace life.

Jesus leads and we follow. We think we walk alone, but Jesus walks with us. We think we need to be in control, and Jesus tells us, "If you lose your life, you will gain it."

So many of us are like Frank, blaming others and not seeing our own part of unhealthy dynamics. We say we want to be free, to follow Jesus, yet find all sorts of reasons to hold back.

We need to be gentle with ourselves - to untangle the knots that bind us with love and compassion. We might need a kind, listening ear, we might need to go and unburden ourselves in confession, we might need to observe closely what it is that keeps us wound up in knots.

But the result will hopefully be the same, we will feel free, unburdened, and ready to follow the one we call teacher, saviour, lord. The one who came to call each one of us into new life - a life in community, a life of compassion and caring, a life of curiosity and wonder, a life that transforms our sin and death into life and freedom.

No one needs to travel alone. We are called to travel with friends, partners, fellow pilgrims. And we are not heading off into the bleak unknown. We are following Jesus, holy pattern for our lives.

And so to hone our ears, our eyes, our hearts, we come to be fed by the body and blood of the one who came to live with us; Jesus - God *with* us.

Amen.

