

In This Together
1/22/12 Ebenezer

Mark 1:14-20

-tell the truth now, have you ever thought to yourself, “How could a person possibly be a liberal and a Christian at the same time?”

-you might say, “How can someone call themselves a follower of Jesus and be in favor of legal abortion and support gay unions let alone gay marriage?”

-or, if you are of a different persuasion, you might wonder – “How is it conceivable to be a Christian conservative?”

-“how can you be against funding for poor and hungry people and the protection of the rights for minorities and say you follow Jesus?”

-OK, let’s take a quick poll – raise hands, how many people asked it about Democrats?...just kidding, ☺ don’t put your hand up

-I was in a situation of conflict in a church once and I was really sure that the person despised me and was out to get me

-she was a powerful person, she was scary

-and it was infuriating because no matter what I tried to do I could not get through to her that I was really a good guy and knew what I was doing

-what was even worse was that she was someone who was and still is loved and respected, someone who worked very hard worker in the congregation

-finally I just had to admit it to myself: this person is a person of faith

-this person loves the Lord just like I try to and is doing her best to serve him

-she feels called and she is answering the call

-and I am just going to have to deal with it; work it out somehow; this chaos

-I’m thinking about these things because we are in the middle of the week of Prayer for Christian Unity

-which happens, I understand, to fall during Global Mission month here at Ebenezer every year

-a time to celebrate diversity that the Spirit of Christ works around the world in wildly diverse ways according to culture and ethnicity

- and in very different denominations, theology and worship styles
- and the World Council of Churches sponsors of the week to help us focus for eight days in Epiphany season on the very fact that there is such a thing as the church universal
- that when we say church, we don't just mean our congregation, or the ELCA
- or even Lutherans but all the many different denominations in every part of the world, Methodists and Greek Orthodox and Assemblies of God
- we are the church
- because, so, you know, sometimes we take a look at what some of our brothers and sisters teach and preach
- and how some of them worship and how they behave in public, even in our own country
- folks who want to burn the Koran or shout obscenities at funerals or whatever
- or, probably, how those folks look at us and say, they're dull
- and we all say, no, this has nothing to do with me, this is not where Jesus is leading is leading me
- this is not the Jesus I follow, this is not the Jesus who calls me
- the week of prayer for Christian Unity, I think, reminds us that, well, actually, it does have something to do with us
- ain't but one Jesus
- and we are in this together, and we need each other to be the church
- there are those cynics who would use the name Christianity to rip people off of their money
- and to wield power and abuse people; even the original twelve had one betrayer
- but for the most part, even with Judas, 83% or so of us, most of us believe that they are following Jesus
- and this train of thought has big implications
- for example, it's easy to look back at the Crusades or the Inquisition and say "How phony" to pretend that this was any kind of an attempt to follow Jesus
- I was reading about the Spanish conquistadores this week on the Christianity Today web site

- Hernando Cortes, conquered Mexico, basically from the Aztec empire
- yet he would cheerfully lure Aztecs into a trap and mercilessly slaughter them
- had no qualms about it
- until he became, basically, the ruler of Mexico, fabulously wealthy, immense power; obviously he was bent on fame and fortune
- apparently Cortes thought of himself as a devout Christian, supposedly never spoke to a priest without removing his hat
- Cortés preached the gospel to various Indian chiefs, urging them to replace their idols with a Christian altar, cross, and images of the Virgin Mary
- would almost get physically sick when he saw idols
- imagine for a second that this brutal killer really believed it; that Cortes really thought he was following the call of Christ; that he was being faithful in his way; that he was doing the best he could
- it's scary
- or the heretics from first century, or the people who executed the heretics
- they were just trying to be faithful, just like us
- to go back further: Jesus calls his first disciples
- Mark's Gospel: John's arrested, so Jesus takes over from him proclaiming the message of repentance, but also proclaiming the good news of God
- it's very ironic in Mark, because as I understand it the Greek word for proclaiming *kerusso* is not a word that means preaching or teaching
- it's the word that applies to victory in war – to proclaim the *evangelion* – the good news of victory
- it's a shout of triumph
- so Jesus, Mark is suggesting, is not in his Mr. Rogers mode
- he would be more in his maybe Tim Tebow mode
- and when you know the end of the story – that he ends up dead on a cross, and in Mark's gospel when the women find the tomb empty they run away in terror and don't tell anyone

-after this proclamation of victory
-Mark is making a point

-so after this big energetic start, it sort of trails off; then he moseys along by the Sea of Galilee

-he happens to “pass by” and sees a couple of fishermen and so he calls them, he says, come here, I’ll show you something

-bam, immediately, Mark’s favorite word, they follow him

-not sure why, they just thought that was the faithful thing to do, they just heard and responded

-so the three of them mosey on a little further, oh, a couple more fishermen

-bam, immediately, he calls them, the follow too, drop everything

-it’s another sermon as to who these guys were, how they were faithfully waiting for the Messiah

-there was something about Jesus that makes them leave everything, family, livelihood

-but it was almost random, almost as though he just happened to by the sea and so who was there, fishermen, so OK let’s get some people together: “you guys”

-we’re going to start a church

-actually, he doesn’t say church of course, and they don’t know until much later that Jesus is going to go away and leave them and tell them that they’re it

-and it’s not until the Book of Acts that we find out just what he had in mind, but I’m sure Jesus knew

-so, you might say “fisherman” he picked them because that’s symbolic and he gets to use that great line “I’ll make you fish for people”

-but then the next thing you know he’s passing by a tax collector – yuck –

-“oh, hey, you, come on”

-and he gathers up this group, a scholar, traditionally how we think of Nathaniel

-the other Simon was a zealot, a militant who wanted to overthrow the Romans by force

-later, of course, Paul had been a religion professor, a Pharisee

-and so Jesus, it seems to me, jumbled all these people together, got a mix of people and said, basically, we're going to have a church, y'all work it out

-discuss

-and the Holy Spirit will guide you, lead you, help you

-but before Jesus was even gone they were fussing about who was going to be the greatest among them

-he said, that's now how it works

-James and John didn't give up easily; they kept on jockeying for the best seats, on Jesus right and left

-of course, we know from the book of Acts that once Paul got in the picture he went toe to toe with Peter at least once in front of the whole group about the direction of the church

-and in the gospel of Mark itself it's a constant theme that the apostles were just, well, kind of clowns

-they didn't get it, they misunderstood Jesus regularly, wanted to stay up on the mountain of transfiguration; couldn't stay awake while Jesus was praying; denied him, left him to die alone

-and so on

-and yet, clearly they were called by Jesus, and I think it's fair to say we think they were faithful as best as they could be

-and that whether they followed "immediately" or even if some of them were a little reluctant at first, throughout it all, they were doing the best they could

-and so, these twelve, filled in by Matthias after the unfortunate business with Judas (back to 100% faithfulness) became the church

-grew, until this is what we have, not just Ebenezer but the world church

-Democrats and Republicans and Roman Catholics and COGIT and I don't know what all

-and we're all in this together; we need each other and we just have to work it out

-we have to, and we can, we will, sometimes we even do

-because somewhere between 83 and 100 percent of us are being faithful as best we can

-and we are trying to follow Jesus' call

