

A New Start  
Mark 1:14-20

We've been talking about fresh starts the last few weeks. We've talked about how circumstances have given fresh starts to the world, our nation, and our church during this new year. This morning we will talk about how Christ provides the possibility of a fresh start for each of us.

The first question which comes to mind when we talk about Christ giving us a fresh start is, "Do I need a fresh start?"

Now, we can think of people who need a fresh start. This is kind of like when people come out of the church after a sermon and someone will say to me, "Preacher, I know someone who needed to hear that sermon," and I'm thinking, "Maybe it was you who needed to hear that sermon."

We can think of people who need a fresh start because they have made a mess of their lives.

I was in a prayer group with a couple once. They were as sweet and loving a couple as you would ever hope to meet. One evening I told how much I enjoyed watching them together, because they were so obviously in love. He said, "It hasn't always been that way. There was a time when I loved to party. I would do anything that was fun. I had the morals of an alley cat." His wife begged him to change his ways. He said he would, but he didn't. She finally gave up on him and left, taking their two small children. At first he didn't think he would care. He had always had fun, and he expected to continue to have fun. But it didn't take him long to realize how much he loved and missed his wife and his children. He realized he had made a terrible mess of his life. He thought about going to his wife and asking her to come back. But he thought, "What's the use. I'll just fall back into my old ways, and drive her away again." He was stuck in the muck. Then a friend invited him to a spiritual renewal weekend. The only reason he went was because he had nothing left to lose. They studied the story of the Prodigal Son and how he made a mess of his life with riotous living. He was stuck in the muck literally, feeding hogs. He returned home to his father, and his father's love restored him. As he heard the story of the Prodigal Son again, for the first time he felt the loving presence of Christ, and he knew that Christ could give him the strength to start over again. He straightened his life out. He convinced his wife that Christ had made him a new man. He got a fresh start, and he has worked at making the most of it ever since. Christ gave him a fresh start.

There are myriads of stories of people who have made a mess of their lives, and Christ gave them a fresh start.

But what about the people who haven't made a mess of their lives? Do they also need a fresh start? Yes. Christ gives a fresh start to people who haven't made a mess of their lives, and it usually comes in the form of a new call to ministry.

Peter and Andrew and James and John hadn't made a mess of their lives. They were decent, respectable, responsible family men. They were fishermen. That's an

honorable profession. They were good at what they did. They had their own boats. To have your own boat was a status symbol. Their boats were big enough that they employed others to help them on their boats. They were successful businessmen. Many people would gladly have traded places with them.

I know of some people who think that fishing for a living would be heaven on earth. I don't. For me fishing is an exercise in futility. I have gone fishing on many occasions, and very rarely do I catch a fish. I read an article in *Field and Stream* some years ago that might explain why. It said that when people put the bait on the hook they leave a scent on the bait, and the fish don't like the smell of some people. I guess I'm one of those people. What does it say about you if the fish think you smell bad?

But some people who are good at catching fish might think that would be a wonderful way to make a living. I used to play racquetball with a fellow who was a man's made. He loved hunting and fishing. He was a hardcore fisherman. He was a young, ambitious guy. He decided to combine his work and his passion, so he decided to create one of these shows about fishing for television. His plan was to go all over the world, fishing in the most exotic places and to make a show about each fishing expedition. After several months he gave it up. I asked him why. He said, "One day I realized I was worn out and needed to take a vacation. It dawned on me that the only vacations I had ever taken were to take a trip somewhere and go fishing. I had turned my vacations into work, and now I didn't have any way to take a vacation from my work." Whatever you do day after day, gets to be work, even if you enjoy it. I'm sure any professional fisherman would tell you that. And, of course, they would also tell you that professional fishing is hard, dangerous work.

But it was and is an honest way to make a living and to feed your neighbors. Being a fisherman was and is a good thing to do, just as are many other solid, respectable ways of making a living. The problem is that while the fish that fishermen catch can feed people's stomachs, they don't feed people's soul.

There comes a point in many people's lives when they find themselves thinking, "There has to be more to life than this." There has to be more to life than just making a living, making enough to survive. Isn't there more to life than just going to work each day so that you can make enough money to have food so that you have the energy to go to work another day?

And, of course, the answer is, Yes. There is something more.

Jesus gave Peter and Andrew and James and John a fresh start in life by giving them a new call. He called them to do something more with their lives than just make a living. Jesus called them to be fishers of people. They were called to join Jesus as he spread God's net to catch people who are also hungry for more than just surviving from day to day—people who aspire to higher and better things than just having enough to eat. Jesus was calling them to find and feed people whose souls were starving for the nourishment which comes from God.

Suddenly Peter and Andrew and James and John found new meaning and purpose for their lives. They were to do more than just make a living. They were called to bring life to the spiritually dead.

Christ gave one of my brothers a fresh start on life when he was in his mid-fifties. He worked for Frito-Lay most of his life. Year after year, five days a week he would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and go to the plant to load his truck. Then he would drive

his truck to the stores on his route and stock their shelves with fritos and potato chips. Wayne was good at his job. He is a natural-born salesman. He would make friends with store managers, and one day he would say, "Since we're friends, would you let me set up a special display or have more shelf space?" And the manager would say, "Sure. I'm glad to help a good guy like you." He was good at what he did. He enjoyed it. He made a good living. But over the years, he became weary. Then one day he called me, and the old spark was back. He was more excited and happy than he had been in years. A little part-time church nearby lost their pastor. The District Superintendent asked him if he would be willing to preach at that little church on Sundays. He jumped at the offer. He has since retired from Frito-Lay to devote more time to that little church. He says, "You know, providing potato chips for people is satisfying in a way. But providing the Word of God for people gives me a whole different level of joy and satisfaction." Jesus has given Wayne a fresh start on life with a new calling.

Now, when I say that Jesus gives us a fresh start with a new call, I don't mean that he calls everyone to leave their jobs and become pastors. He didn't even call the disciples to leave their jobs as fishermen. We get the impression they never returned to their homes or their boats. But if you read the gospel stories, we find that Jesus often led them back home and there are many stories of them returning to their boats to fish. He gave them time to go fishing, so that they could continue to support their families.

We have to earn a living. That's necessity. Paul spent his entire ministry supporting himself as a tentmaker. Peter and Andrew and James and John continued to make their livings as fishermen until the church grew large enough that they could make their living as fulltime pastors.

All the same, their lives were never the same. Before Jesus called them, they fished to make a living. After Jesus called them, they lived to fish for people. They continued to make a living, but it was so that they could do what was really important.

I knew a man who was trained to maintain and repair airplanes. He was a good mechanic and took pride in his work. I asked him if he enjoyed his work. He said, "I didn't use to. I didn't dislike it. It was just a way to make a living. Then, one day a pilot asked me if I flew. I said, 'No, I've never even thought about flying.' He said, 'Come on up with me.' We went up in his airplane. In a little while he said, 'Okay, I'm giving you control.' He showed me how to use the steering wheel and the rudder, and I started flying. I immediately fell in love with flying. I decided right then and there to learn how to fly and to buy my own airplane. I still work on planes. I used to do it to make a living. Now I do it so that I can fly. I enjoy working on airplanes a lot more than I used to because now I love airplanes."

That's kind of what it's like to be a follower of Christ. We used to work to make a living. But then Christ comes along and touches us in that wonderful and profound way that lifts us higher than we ever thought was possible. We may change jobs or professions. We may not. But whatever we do, we do it for a different reason. Now we do what we do, not just to make a living, but to do for others what Christ has done for us. Our work makes it possible to touch people and lift them up, to love them and care for them as Christ loves us and cares for us.

When Jesus called the disciples to follow him, he opened up a new world for them. He gave them eyes to see into the beauty and majesty of heavenly things, of learning things so profound that they could only understand them in their hearts, of

entering into the awesome and awful presence of God. He enabled them to see people in a different light, to see that as God's beloved children people are of far more worth than any wealth we might earn, that each person's life was more fascinating and entertaining than the most fantastic spectacles the world offers. Jesus gave the disciples the power to touch people's lives and transform them by showing them what they had seen in Jesus.

Jesus gave them a fresh start with a new calling.

Jesus gives us a fresh start with a new calling. He calls us to fish for people who are hungry for the things of God. We no longer work for a living. Now we work to bring life to people.

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