

**Following and Fishing**, January 24, 2021, St. Timothy, Burnaby  
1 Corinthians 7.29-31; Psalm 62.6-14; Mark 1.14-20

“God alone is my rock and my salvation, [...] my deliverance and my honour; God is my strong rock and my refuge.”

### *Prayer*

“The present form of this world is passing away.” We’ve all heard the cry from doomsday prophets. We’ve heard the stories of cults and leaders who have decided when the “end of the world” will be. We may have even heard of people profiting from these movements, like the [company that promises to take care of your pets after the rapture for a one-time fee](#). None of this is new—even before the gospels themselves were written down Christians leaders had to tell people to keep on living their lives and not just wait around for Armageddon [Thessalonians]. It seems as though even the apostle Paul himself was surprised when Jesus didn’t come back in his lifetime. People had to adjust their plans—anticipate a later date for Jesus’ return and the inevitable destruction that would accompany it.

We’ve been “adjusting our expectations” for *two thousand years* already. The end of the world didn’t come with the millennium, and some of us are starting to wonder if we’ve misunderstood something all along.

When Paul tells the people of Corinth that “the present form of this world is passing away,” he probably meant “soon,” and they probably expected the end soon. But when we hear such warnings today, either from the scriptures or preachers (or doomsayers on the street corners), we probably don’t have much sense of *urgency*. What’s the rush? What makes you so convinced that the end is coming *now*? I’m sure there’s still time. There always has been up until now.

But before Paul even wrote those letters, Jesus was walking around Galilee, telling the people something that sounded similar. As we heard from Mark’s gospel, Jesus told the people “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Jesus *does* say that “the time is fulfilled” and tells people to repent.

He doesn’t say “...or else.” He’s not promising meteors and earthquakes and lightning and famine. Not here, anyway. But he is saying something. “The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” I think Jesus would agree with Paul—the time to act is now! But not for the reason we might expect.

Jesus calls on people to repent and believe the good news. Not to save their own skin, but to be part of this movement that he is leading. The kingdom of God has come near. Jesus is on the earth. The time is fulfilled. Things are happening. Change is afoot!

We have seen some of this change. We have witnessed the world improving. Shifting. But we also know enough history to know that this progression has not been a straight line. We can’t simply look back and see the progress we’ve made as a species without taking the time to acknowledge the many many missteps we’ve made along the way. But it is a *way*. It is a path, forward.

And it is this path that Jesus calls those first disciples to follow him on.

He doesn't say a lot, in those first exchanges, but what he does say is important. When Jesus calls the fishermen, he tells them, "follow me and I will make you fish for people." There are *two* important details in this short sentence: "follow me" and "I will make you fish for people." They are not quite the same thing.

In Christian circles we talk often about "following Jesus". We marvel at these early disciples who, at a moment's notice literally leave everything and follow Jesus. In our modern world things are...complicated. When we imagine ourselves as followers of Jesus it means something different. We often talk about our multi-faceted identities: I am a father. I am a son. I am husband. I am a Christ follower. We all have these many details to our personality. But even more than our complicated *identities*, we also have complicated lives. There is a lot going on, even when there is not a lot going on. Even our rest time is often scheduled to maximize efficiency. We have a list of books we are going to read, and the order we will read them in. As soon as the groceries are bought there is already a new list started with the next thing that will be needed. We have plans to exercise, socialize, improve our lives, our marriages, and our productivity. When we take the time to focus on one aspect of our lives, all those other areas are just waiting for their turn for our attention. Social media companies also vie for our attention, competing with our "real life" challenges and with advertisers and "news." It's exhausting just thinking about it. Is this you? Or is this just me?

When Jesus calls those first disciples, he says, "follow me." And they follow him.

When Jesus calls us today, so often many of us say, "sure thing, Jesus. I'll add it to my list." It's already a full list, but Jesus is important, so we can probably fit prayer, reading the bible, and going to church somewhere in-between work, exercise, keeping up with friends and family, and making sure to get the most out of our "self-care."

Imagine for a moment the *freedom* those first disciples felt when they dropped their nets and walked away from their boats. Sure, this was terrifying, but at the same time, it was completely *freeing*. They weren't coming back to anything later. They didn't set up their old life so it would be easy to step back into it later. They just *left*.

Is that how we first decided to follow Jesus? Is that how we follow Jesus now? Not putting him in our calendar and scheduling a time to "walk with Jesus," but instead throwing our calendar away entirely? Is it even *possible* to see life that way? To drop *everything* from our lives and put Jesus at the centre, only bringing anything back into our lives when it contributes to the path we are on with Jesus?

[pause] Just imagine that for a moment. [long pause]

There is a *task* that Jesus gives those first disciples. He tells them that he will make them "fish for people." I expect most of us have understood this as a metaphor for bringing people together; and it is suitable because they already fish...for fish. So Jesus is telling them to gather people instead of gathering fish.

But what if there's more to that metaphor? After all, fish don't do so well after they've been caught. Things are far better for fish *before* they're caught. "It's just a metaphor." Maybe Jesus was thinking of *rescuing* these "fish." That's one interpretation. These disciples are out to save the "fish" from the water that they don't even realize is bad for them.

Maybe.

But here's another possibility: what if the "people" that are being *hooked* are not the ones who need saving. What if fishing for these people actually refers to removing comfortable people from where they are? What if Jesus' disciples were being called to *remove* the problematic people from their comfortable positions of power and thereby *destabilize* the system that oppressed and harmed so many people? After all, elsewhere in scripture [Ezekiel 29; Amos 4] God *does* talk about removing wicked rulers with... *fishhooks!*

What if the role of a follower of Jesus is to be part of this *new* system; to be part of bringing about a world where **all** people are treated fairly and justly? Where income disparity is *decreased* instead of constantly increasing? Where the poor and hungry get what they need?

What if by following Jesus we are being *active* in creating this new world, and not just faithfully waiting for God to bring it about? What if by using our fishhooks to pull unjust rulers from their comfortable environments we are actually helping the present form of the world to "pass away"?

Jesus called those first disciples to follow him, and Jesus calls us today as well to follow him. To follow his example and stand up for the marginalized and oppressed. To spread the good news: God's kingdom has come near. The time is fulfilled. Repent from our old ways of life. Look forward to that new world that is promised; that new world that *we* can help to usher in. Rather than following our own path and obstructing this progress, we can choose to follow Jesus' lead and help to re-create the world. We can be a part of God's re-ordering of our fallen world. This is good news indeed!

"God alone is my rock and my salvation, [...] my deliverance and my honour; God is my strong rock and my refuge. Put your trust in God always, O people, pour out your hearts before the one who is our refuge."