

Invite, Invite, Invite! Everyone Needs Jesus

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

6th in a seven-part series

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Mark 1:14–20 (CEB)

¹⁴ After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, ¹⁵ saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

¹⁶ As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." ¹⁸ Right away, they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. ²⁰ At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Acts 8:26–40 (CEB)

²⁶ An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, "At noon, take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) ²⁷ So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of Candace. (Candace is the title given to the Ethiopian queen.) ²⁸ He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Approach this carriage and stay with it."

³⁰ Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?"

³¹ The man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him. ³² This was the passage of scripture he was reading [see Isaiah 53:7-8]:

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent
so he didn't open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation
justice was taken away from him.
Who can tell the story of his descendants
because his life was taken
from the earth?

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. ³⁶ As they went down the road, they came to some water.

The eunuch said, "Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?" ³⁸ He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Lord's Spirit suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip found himself in Azotus. He traveled through that area, preaching the good news in all the cities until he reached Caesarea.

It's really very simple. Why must we invite friends and family to join us at St. Andrew? Because everyone needs Jesus. Come and see!

"Everyone needs Jesus." A true statement. Not because Jesus is Solver-of-All-Problems, for he's not. But because, until we come to faith in Christ, we are estranged from the One who made us and loves us. Without Jesus, our search for meaning and purpose will necessarily lead us to frustration and disappointment. If we are truly made in God's image, how could we ignore God and hope to be the people we were created to be?

As I write this, it is the morning after the Super Bowl. I have added one more question to my list of questions for which there is no answer – Why not just hand the ball to Marshawn Lynch? Getting past that mystery, I noticed a Super Bowl commercial by the

so-called “church” of Scientology offering the “Age of Answers.” That’s ridiculous. Scientology is, quite literally, the last place you would look for answers to any question, other than how you can make them rich.

The “answer” has always been, is now, and always shall be Jesus. That’s why we strive so hard to make St. Andrew a place where people can come and see Jesus at work in this small portion of his Body. We must be like a magnet that God uses to draw people in so that they too can follow Christ. That’s why you’ll see so many changes here in the

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Here you have it. If you are looking for a one-sentence description of Jesus’ ministry, this is it. These are the first words Jesus speaks in Mark’s gospel. So let’s take a closer look at them.

Now is the time! For centuries, the Jews had labored under foreign rule that was often brutal. They waited with great hope and anticipation for the day when God would again rule, when God’s kingdom would come, when all the world would see that YHWH is God. Jesus’ announces that their waiting is over – the time has come!

Here comes God’s kingdom! Jesus announces that, yes!, God’s rule is about to burst upon them; the story is coming to a climax. God will again be king. There will be no room for Caesar or any other pretenders to lordship. There will be only one Lord (and it will turn out to be Jesus!).

Change your hearts and lives Jesus is not inviting his fellow Jews to join some sort of social club. Rather, he invites them to recognize and to regret that they have been wrong-headed in their approach to being God’s people. Jesus invites them to abandon their own agendas and follow his. This is not about simply being sorry for what they did; Jesus calls them to turn 180° and take a new path.

Trust this good news The word “believe” is often used here, but it can throw us off here; it makes it all seem too intellectual. Instead, Jesus speaks here of trust, of embracing Jesus and his proclamation with our whole being. The good news is that Jesus is Lord, not anyone or anything else. Our loyalty and devotion must lie with Jesus.

next year. That’s why we need to get better at facing outward, at making sure we will do all can to make sure people who step onto our campus will feel like they have come home. Some of the changes might make you a bit uncomfortable. Well, as Bishop Jones said, “Get out of your comfort zone.” Peter had to step out of the boat; so do we.

The invitation

So, we invite, invite, and invite some more. It was this way with Jesus. Should it be any less so with us? In the space of just a few sentences at the beginning of his gospel, Mark tells us of Jesus’ bold invitation.

In the first pronouncement of his public ministry, Jesus calls on the people to “repent, and believe in the good news.” Usually, we think of repentance as merely being sorry for what we did and see Jesus’ invitation as no more than a call to mend our sinful ways. But, Jesus invited them to a much more profound understanding of repentance. In Jesus’ day, the Greek word we translate “repent” had political connotations. In essence, Jesus called on hearers to give up their agenda, even their way of being God’s people, and embrace Jesus’ agenda, Jesus’ aims, Jesus’ way of being the people of God. Jesus called on them to believe the good news, to trust these words of proclamation: Jesus is Lord, not Caesar – Jesus!

In Mark’s gospel, we hardly have time to catch our breath after hearing Jesus’ first challenging invitation before Mark takes us to the seashore, where Jesus approaches Simon and Andrew and

says “follow me and I will make you fish for people. Note that Jesus doesn’t say “follow God,” rather he says, “follow me.” This alone would have been upsetting to first-century Jews. After all, the Jews had always known themselves as the chosen of God, called to follow God. Looking back from our day, we can see in Jesus’ invitation to follow him, a hint as to Jesus’ true nature and vocation. With the benefit of hindsight, we understand that Jesus’ invitation to follow him is an invitation from God. Indeed,

Jesus' invitation to Simon and Andrew and James and John parallels God's invitation to Abraham nearly 2000 years before. God had invited Abraham to "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). This invitation, accepted by Abraham, forever changed his life, the lives of his descendants and all peoples, just as did the invitation accepted by Simon and Andrew.

"Follow me"

Though there are dozens of uses of the word "follow" in the New Testament (e.g., "whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" [Matt 10:38]), when telling us of Jesus' first invitation to Simon and Andrew, both Matthew and Mark use a Greek construction never used elsewhere in the same way, *deute + opiso*, literally, "come after." Their choice of words is profoundly theological. *Opiso* means "behind" or "after," as in going after God. As Kittel¹ notes, in the Old Testament, going after God means obedience! Hence, Jesus is not simply inviting Simon and Andrew to follow him; he is demanding total commitment. There can be no turning back. This is a call for total allegiance. Jesus' disciples will be called to a life of obedience, self-denial, and sacrificial love. Jesus' opponents saw this. Indeed, the Pharisees would complain that the people had "gone after" (*opiso*) Jesus (John 12:19). Paul also understood that he was abandoning his old life for a life of total commitment to Christ when he wrote "Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it on my own: but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13).

Clearly, Matthew and Mark want us to comprehend that Jesus' invitation to Simon and Andrew, indeed to all those wishing to follow him, is a profoundly life-changing invitation every bit as challenging as God's invitation to Abraham that he leave all he knows and embark on a journey to an unknown land that will be shown to him by God. Also, like the invitation to Abraham, Jesus' invitations to Simon and Andrew seem to be less like requests and more like commands. As Jesus' parable of the great dinner (Luke 14:15-24) tells us, such invitations can be rejected only at great peril! So, we invite and we invite and we invite. *Come and see!* (John 1:39, 46)

Being ready

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates that there is more to inviting than the simple phrase "come and see." We have to be ready to play our part, to help. As the story shows well, God is with us every step of the way, but Philip had to be ready and willing to get in that carriage and help the Ethiopian man understand what he was reading, help him to make sense of Isaiah 53. Could you help someone with this? Have you really made yourself ready? This is the work of us all; to be ready to defend and explain our faith, always doing so with "respectful humility" and a good conscience (see 1Peter 3:15-16).

Robert Wall reflects on Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian:

"How can I understand Scripture unless someone guides me?" (see 8:31). The Ethiopian eunuch is a double outcast within Israel, twice rejected by those in control of religious sentiment because of where he lives and because he has been castrated: his sexuality has excluded him from the assembly of God and his distance from the holy city makes for a difficult pilgrimage. Similar concerns continue to be impediments today for those from society's margins who seek after God. The way of the eunuch's salvation establishes a pattern of catechesis [instruction] for the convert who must travel some distance to secure God's salvation. . . . the emphasis of his story of the eunuch's conversion is placed on reception of the Scripture. Certainly the images of the Spirit's detailed guidance of

¹ From Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged and translated by G. Bromily)

² Wall, R. W. (1994–2004). The Acts of the Apostles. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 10, p.

Philip in this narrative—giving him direction, inspiring his interpretation, transporting him from place to place—symbolize God’s active presence in enabling the church’s mission in the world, especially among those whom our religious traditions marginalize.

. . . For all the current debate about the authority of Scripture in the contemporary church, of equal importance in Luke’s story world is the authority of Scripture’s interpreter. The eunuch, who evidently understood the importance of Scripture in his search for God, recognized as well the importance of one who could interpret its meaning for him. Philip’s authority to do so has already been evinced by his continuing obedience to God’s calling.²

Invited to join a new family

When we invite people to Christ, we are inviting them to join a new family. If we bring to mind all that is good about the families into which we are first born, we can begin to imagine the hope and love and promise of the family into which we have been reborn, the family of God.

Jesus knew that his disciples would find it pretty hard to grasp this business about a new family, a family that demanded his disciples’ primary allegiance. Once, while Jesus’ mother and brothers waited to see him, Jesus said “Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33-35). A crucial truth of our faith is that when we gaze around the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, we are looking at more than friends and neighbors, they are family. They are our brothers and sisters.

Though our invitation to others might begin with a simple invitation to visit St. Andrew, we ought to bear in mind that the invitation Jesus extends is life changing, touching every part of our lives, our minds, our hearts, and our hands.

So we invite, invite, and invite some more. Make an impact. *Come and see!*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. How did you first get to St. Andrew? Were you invited? By whom and how? How did you feel when you were invited? Have you ever invited someone to come with you to St. Andrew? You might share some of the inviting stories. What holds us back from inviting friends and neighbors to St. Andrew? How could we get bolder for Christ? What are some tools or techniques that have helped you to be more invitation? Do you think it always has to be an invitation to worship? How about to a Bible Study or a concert or a youth activity. There are many doors here. How could we get better at using them all?
2. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ first public statement challenges listeners to “repent, and believe in the good news.” What do you think he means by “repent?” How do you respond when you hear the word “repent?” What might this mean in your own life? What agenda do we really follow? Who sets our priorities? What is the good news in which we are called to believe? If it is truly a proclamation that Jesus is Lord, how would this change the priorities in your life?
3. Take a few moments and read Jesus’ parable of the great dinner in Luke 14:16-24. In the parable, who is the host for the dinner? Who are the invited guests? Why might all these people have made excuses for not coming to the dinner? Does the host invite them again? What do you think of the host’s idea to invite the needy?! Why do you think Jesus told this parable? What point is he trying to make? Why did he use a parable to make his point?

² Wall, R. W. (1994–2004). The Acts of the Apostles. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 10, p. 145). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday Genesis 6:11-22 God's invitation to Noah</p>	<p>Tuesday Exodus 3 God's invitation to Moses</p>
<p>Wednesday Isaiah 2:2-4 God's invitation to all the nations, written about 700 years before Jesus.</p>	<p>Thursday John 1:35-51 Jesus' invitation to Andrew and others. Note what Andrew does after meeting Jesus for the first time!</p>
<p>Friday Luke 14:1-24 The invitation and humility; Jesus' parable of the great dinner</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

