

Mark 1: 14 – 20

'Repentance'

Prayer ...

What do you do if you see and hear someone preaching "Repentance" on a street corner?

I gather the last time someone was doing that in the middle of Whitchurch – they were subject to considerable heckling!

But in our Gospels – this morning reminds us that it wasn't only John-the-Baptist who called people to repentance – it was also Jesus.

Perhaps we've been so put off by the way in which some people do this – that we don't listen at all ... yet Jesus linked repentance to Good News! It was a positive message.

One thing we might not be aware of is that those four fishermen were working under the Roman system.

By the time Jesus starts recruiting disciples, the fishing industry in Palestine is fully under the control of the Roman Empire. Caesar owns every body of water, and all fishing is state-registered for the benefit of the urban elite. Fishermen can't obtain licenses to fish without joining a syndicate, most of what they catch is exported – leaving local communities impoverished and hungry, deprived of the dietary staple they've depended on for centuries – and the Romans collect exorbitant taxes, levies, and tolls each time fish are sold. To catch even one fish outside of this exploitative system is illegal.

In this context, what is Jesus saying when he invites the four fishermen to leave their nets and "fish for people?" In his book, *Binding the Strong Man*, theologian and activist **Ched Myers** argues that we narrow and distort the radical nature of this text when we interpret it as an invitation only to call individuals to repent and believe; he is hearkening back to the Hebrew scriptures, in which "the hooking of fish" is a euphemism for judgment upon the rich (Amos 4:2) and the powerful (Ezekiel 29: 4). In other words, when Jesus asks Simon, Andrew, James and John to "fish for people," he is asking them to cast aside the existing social order of power, privilege, exploitation, and domination, and to help usher in God's kingdom – a kingdom of justice for the poor, mercy for the oppressed, and abundance for all.

This, I think is what Climate Activists are asking us all to do for the sake of God's earth. To repent – to change – to live in new ways.

I remember seeing one speech by Greta Thunberg to world leaders in 2019: **"How dare you ... How dare you look away ... and come here saying that you're doing enough?"**

That was and is a call to repent – to change our ways ... and a call that, if heeded and acted upon, will lead to good news.

So, let's not downplay or write off repentance ... because in so doing we lose the Good News too.

It is relevant at the level of each of our individual lives ... what do we need to turn away from in order to receive more of Christ's abundant life ... and it's important at wider societal levels too.

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<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1623-fishing-for-people>