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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

Third Sunday of Epiphany

January 24, 2021

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Ps. 62:5-12; I Cor. 7:29-31; Mark 1.14-20

About 20 years ago I did a super crazy thing that I only did because I expected and trusted the outcome. Mike, my now husband, and I were dating at the time and he invited me to his brother and sister-in-law's 10th wedding anniversary party where I would be meeting some of his family members for the first time. We spent the whole day together and as the evening was coming to a close, I stood up from where I was sitting, got down on one knee in front of Mike, pulled out a little aluminum foil ring I had made, and asked Mike to marry me – *in front of his whole family, some of whom I had just met.*

Even thinking about it now makes me shudder – because what if he had said no? In front of his family members I barely even knew? Well, obviously I was in love, but I think it was much more than that. I expected that Mike would say yes. I trusted our relationship to know there was a future beyond what was. Even though it was risky, I expected and trusted the outcome of taking that risk.

It makes me wonder how the disciples in the gospel of Mark felt, immediately leaving their nets and their family members when Jesus said to them “follow me and I will make you fish for people.” According to Mark, these brand-new disciples barely knew Jesus. So far all they had heard from John was that Jesus was more powerful than he was and would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and the only words they had heard Jesus say up to that point were, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” And yet, as Mark says, *immediately* the disciples left their nets and their father to follow Jesus.

Now I'm fairly certain that there's more to the story than we actually hear in the gospel of Mark. I can't imagine truly leaving everything you knew to follow someone you barely knew. However, there must have been something the disciples experienced in Jesus to make them expect and trust the outcome of following him. Kind of like I expected and trusted the outcome of asking Mike to marry me.

Of course, what we know from the rest of the gospel of Mark and the other gospels is that what the disciples expected and trusted truly came to be. Following Jesus meant that they experienced God in a new way, they witnessed God ushering in a new way of life through Jesus, they witnessed Jesus overturning the system of power and privilege to lift up the lowly and feed the hungry and show mercy to sinners and offer grace to the downtrodden.

Because they expected and trusted the outcome of following Jesus, the risk the disciples took turned out to change them and form them into a person like the one they followed.

I wonder if in our life of faith we don't take the risks, the chances, to follow Jesus – to truly drop what we'd normally do in order to do what Jesus does – because we don't expect or trust the outcome. There could be any number of reasons for this: we don't know if following Jesus will put us in uncomfortable situations, we like things the way they are and don't want Jesus to shake up our world, we see our relationship with Jesus as a transactional relationship – what Jesus can do for me – instead of a transformational relationship that will change us to be more like Jesus.

Maybe we don't expect or trust Jesus to have any influence over us. And so instead of leaving our nets and getting out of the boat like the sons of Zebedee did, we become like Zebedee, staying in our safe, comfortable, little boats, unwilling to believe there is more beyond what is.