

**- Saint John's Pulpit (January 24, Third Sunday after the Epiphany)  
- "Renewing Your Discipleship" Mark 1:14-20**

**14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

**16** As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **17** And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him. **19** As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. **20** Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

***Was It the Best?***

When Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, the first thing he did was to call his disciples. I am confident that the text today is very familiar to you all. Four disciples were called by Jesus Christ directly. In light of Jewish tradition, this looks somewhat strange. According to Jewish tradition, it was students that need to ask their teachers for accepting them as a disciple. But in this story, Jesus is asking these fishermen to become his disciples.

This story reminds us of a story of the King David when he was chosen by God which puts in 1 Samuel 16:1.

**16** *Now the LORD said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king." 1 Samuel 16:1 NLT*

Yes, just as Jesus looked for his disciples, God did the same job to look for another king after Saul.

We agree that we need more background history to understand this discipling process by Jesus. What was Jesus' standard to choose his disciples? How did Jesus get information about these fishermen? Were there written tests, background checks, and interviews?

Among lots of questions, one clear message from this story is this. All disciples had to give up everything to follow Jesus! For years, this theme has been praised and highlighted by lots of preachers. Giving up, surrendering all, and life of detachment was regarded as the greatest virtue to become Christians.

To be honest, I used to ask this question to myself. Was it the best? Giving up all was the best to become Jesus' disciples? During this pandemic, like many of you, I have been stressed and anxious. With your support and generous donation, all staff and I have received paychecks in this pandemic. You never know how I am so grateful for your generous and thoughtful support. It means a lot. Not all churches can do! Plus, St. John's has paid 100% apportionment to the Conference.

However, many of my friends in South Korea who are doing ministry are struggling with this pandemic painfully. Mostly they serve very small congregation churches. Under the strong guideline by the government, they have not allowed to doing in-person services at their churches. Close buildings, 10% of people can meet, 20 % of people, and close again...

To support their family and church, they had to look for another job, but not easy. The pandemic took lots of job opportunities from their community. Not only by the pandemic, but I also believe that it is partly from a theological education system in South Korea.

Unlike in the U.S., most pastors in Korea have a single major- theology. They believed that they should be consecrated to be a servant of the Lord from their college education. It sounds very holy, however, may not be practical in this pandemic.

Let's meet these four disciples now- Simon, Andrew, John, and James. They all look like professional fishermen. This means that they are self-supportive.

For John and James, the Bible says that they were sons of Zebedee. Let me read Mark 1:20 again.

*20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. Mark 1:20 NRSV*

Indeed, this is all we know about Zebedee. However, according to other sources out of the Bible, Zebedee was very rich owning lots of ships and servants. Simply speaking, Zebedee was like *Aristotle Onassis (1906-1975)* in Galilee!

Didn't Jesus need his disciples who can make money? One Carpenter met fishermen! What a fantastic combination and collaboration! Through these fishermen, Jesus could have made lots of money through repairing their ships and fishing tools, etc. Or Jesus could have become a family chaplain under the Zebedee family! In the Middle Age Europe, lots of priests chose to become a family chaplain under powerful nobility. But Jesus didn't do it!

Why did those fishermen leave their nets, boat, father, and all human resources to become Jesus' disciples? If they would meet the pandemic like us, their skills, nets, boat, and father will perfectly work for their life! When their church needs to be closed, they can support themselves with their skills. But they didn't do it!

### ***Another disciple candidate - the Rich Young Man***

In Mark 10, there is a story of a rich young man. In general, we tend to focus on its ending scene – the young man failed to follow Jesus because of his possessions. However, do you know that this person was the only one offered by Jesus directly to become his disciple after Jesus' twelve disciples? Let me read Mark 10:21.

*21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." Mark 10:21 NRSV*

It is no exaggeration to call him a religious elite in the Bible. From his birth, nurturing, education, life attitude, and following the law... plus, a big ambition for eternal life (strong life vision) and lots of assets. So, even if he would meet the pandemic, no impact on his ministry! Don't you think that he

is the best candidate to become the thirteenth disciple? Can't we expect to see his contribution to flourishing Jesus' ministry with his possessions?

However, a big irony happened in the next verse.

*22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Mark 10:22 NRSV*

For he had many possessions... can it be the reason why he failed to follow Jesus? What was wrong with this rich young man? Simply speaking, there was no room for Jesus in his life. To place Jesus in his heart, he had to vacate all other things in his heart but couldn't do it. The rich young man lived a religious life but couldn't be Jesus' disciple.

For these fishermen, they had room for Jesus in their lives. So, they could leave everything for Jesus and follow him. Ultimately, one serious question can be raised here. Do you want to be Jesus' disciple? If so, can you make room for him in your life? Becoming His disciple means knowing that He is our priority!

Under this pandemic, we all know that it is not easy to live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are surrounded by lots of worries and challenges. However, this pandemic might be a good chance to check out our faith life. Are we set Jesus as our priority? Is there room for Jesus in our life?

Even for Jesus, he made room for God in his discipling, so he was not tempted by power, money, and secular authority. Not only those fishermen left their nets, but also Jesus left his privileges. So, making disciples could be done through one common process between Divine being and human beings – it was surrendering!

*34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. Mark 8:34-35 NRSV*

Hope we make this pandemic renew our discipleship in Christ.