



Sermon, January 21, 2018
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

“New Direction”

Scripture: Mark 1:12-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news^[a] of God,^[b] ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[c] repent, and believe in the good news.”^[d]

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

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.

Last Week: Bigger Mind

Recap of last week’s scripture lesson: John is baptizing along the River Jordan which symbolizes a life immersed in the power and presence of God. John says Jesus will come to immerse them in the power of the Spirit. This power is experienced as *metanoia*, which means a change of mind, moving into a bigger mind, an expanded consciousness. Jesus goes down in the water to show the world that he is ready embrace the bigger mind of God. He has a vision of the heavens being torn open, and the power of heaven coming into him. The path of Jesus is nothing less than a path into a bigger mind, an expanded consciousness, the *metanoia* John preaches. Our minds literally have to be changed by the power of a torn-open heaven. Today’s scripture continues immediately after that event.

Opening Story: Jordan Management Consultants

Jesus goes into the wilderness for an intensive time of sorting out what to do with this incredible spiritual experience. When he returns, the first

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thing he does is to gather some followers. Now many people have commented upon the characters he chooses to accompany and learn from him. If he had the benefit of modern day psychological profiling tools, things might have gone differently. Take the following, for example:

Memo To: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafter's Carpenter Shop
Nazareth 25922

From: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Galilee Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly

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motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely,

Jordan Management Consultants (Tim Hansel, Eating Problems for Breakfast, Word Publishing, 1988, pp. 194-195.)

Calling the First Disciples

Truly, what was Jesus thinking? We, of course, laugh at this story, but the call of these early disciple is no laughing matter for the Gospel writers. Their call illustrates the second step in the path into the Bigger Mind of Jesus. And in order to understand the full implications of this, I need to have some volunteers come up to help me illustrate the Galilean Fishing Economy of the First Century.

Galilean Fishing Economy

(Use the attached diagram to have people enact the flow of goods, taxes, tolls, and licenses in the Galilean Fishing Economy).

Purpose of Telling These Call Stories

The fishing economy around the entire Mediterranean during the time of Jesus was literally booming. Methods had been developed for preserving fish, which made it possible to transport fish across the Roman Empire. Fish was particularly prized among the rich in Rome, and fish from as far away as Galilee could be found on the tables of Roman citizens, particularly those rich enough to pay for it.

A complex economy arose along the shores of the Sea of Galilee as a result. The fishing economy was strictly controlled, with entire families receiving fishing rights from the Roman authorities, paying taxes and tolls on fish that were caught and sold, and strictly watched to be sure that only those authorized by the Roman authorities were allowed to fish.¹

¹ For a thorough discussion of the Galilean fishing economy, see K.C. Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27 (1997) 99-111.

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Scholars have pointed out that the entire economic structure of the Greco-Roman world was designed to enrich the aristocratic elite, especially through the imposition of various taxes and polls. People did not simply choose an occupation in the manner in which we are able to today. Rather, one had to secure permission and licensing from the Roman authorities, pay fees, and be subject to inspections by those authorities. Those same authorities also regulated who could engage in purchasing and trading items produced or harvested by others.

To step outside of this complex system of economic and political relationships was to place oneself in a highly risky and tenuous position. Not only did a person surrender their livelihood, but they also set aside their status and place within the society. A person's identity was determined to a great extent by their place in the social economy of their time and location. What Jesus asks of Peter, Andrew, James and John is not simply to change jobs as we might view it today. He was in fact telling them to undergo a radical revision of who they were as men. Their identity and self-understanding would change.

Moving into the Bigger Mind Requires Disentangling Our Minds

This whole repentance/conversion thing is not as simple as it appears. Even if one goes with *metanoēō* meaning a change of mind (which still can have levels to what that means), even changing one's mind so that one's behavior is significantly changed is no easy task. Our minds and brains have been literally shaped and formed by everything around us: our language, our every interaction growing up, what we watch constantly on TV or movies, or on our computers, the steady stream of stuff that comes to us on Facebook or Twitter or SnapChat or any of a dozen social media. All of this creates a form of mind that is self-focused, prone to consider violence as a solution to most problems, commodity and acquisitionally-oriented, and, in our culture, obsessed with sex.

The *metanoia* Bigger Mind of Jesus entails changing the very quality and content of one's mind, and changing the configuration of the neurons in the brain. It involves developing a new mode of thinking and perceiving the world. It involves literally an expansion of consciousness. Paul called

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it having the mind of Christ, Jesus called it the Kingdom or Realm of Heaven (or God) that is within us and in our midst. It is a quality of human interaction that grows out of an awareness of how we are connected and related to one another and to all things in contrast to a perception of disconnectedness, separation, and individual isolationism. This is what Jesus came to help humanity realize and develop into. But there are a lot of things that have to be deconstructed, taken apart, disassembled, in order to be rebuilt and reconfigured in our mental landscape. This is the work of the Spirit within us, and we have to consciously disentangle ourselves from the mental hooks and lines that our life in this world have embedded in our minds.

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We cannot do this disentangling on our own. Because we are shaped, formed, and made by being part of human community, we have to be reshaped, reformed, and remade in human community. That is why Jesus calls a group of self-centered, antagonistic, fractious, and often clueless men together with a similar group of women that is only hinted at: to be this new society of *metanoia*, of the Bigger Mind of God. That is why we gather in worship and fellowship and study and service together. We are all absolutely necessary parts of reshaping one another's minds into the Bigger Mind of Christ. This is the New Direction Jesus makes possible. And it is made possible through our work together.

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