



Week 1: Surrender

Day 1 – The Calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John

Mark 1:16-20

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.

Luke 5:1-11

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Understanding the Passage:

When Jesus got in his boat and told him to put out into the deep water, Simon was initially hesitant. After all, Simon was the professional fisherman – not Jesus – and he knew where the fish typically were in the lake. What Jesus was asking was, on its face, unnecessary and too demanding. Based on Simon’s initial response, it seemed to be a futile exercise – he’d

been out all night and caught nothing. You can almost hear how exasperated he is in his words.

How often do we, too, respond with excuses when Jesus calls us to do something that seems too demanding? We are tired, we are busy, we are not the right person, we know better, and so on. The call into deep water is uncomfortable because it's challenging. It pulls us away from what we know or what we are good at and asks us to try something new.

Simon had a good excuse. He could have just stopped there. But when Jesus approached him to use his boat to preach, it was not their first interaction. In Luke 4, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law of a high fever at Simon's home. It does not say who called Jesus to Simon's home, but it would stand to reason that Simon was already well aware of his miraculous power. And so, even though he was reluctant, Simon did what Jesus asked him. And he was rewarded with an exceptionally large haul of fish.

When Jesus gives him his next command – to follow him and become a fisher of men – he does so without any hesitation. But there is one important thing missing in Jesus' call... details. He doesn't promise them riches. He doesn't assure them there will not be any danger. Other than a cryptic declaration about fishing for men, Simon, Andrew, James and John have no idea what they are getting themselves into.

This is especially significant when you understand that fishermen were not typically wealthy or affluent; most were laborers who lived on meager earnings from the unpredictable and fickle nature of what could be caught on a given day. But in Mark's gospel, it says that James and John left their father *and his hired men*. The fact that Zebedee had hired men indicated that he was more successful than most fishermen. Additionally, there is an account in an apocryphal gospel that says Zebedee supplied the high priest's family with fish (this could be the link that John used to get into the high priests' courtyard on the night of Jesus' trial) and Zebedee's name is mentioned in the gospels almost a dozen times, both of which bolster the theory that he had some status and means.

Fishing businesses were typically handed down through the generations – it was common for men to continue the business on their fathers' boats. James and John stood to lose more than just a day job when they left their father's boat to follow Jesus – they stood to lose an inheritance.

For most of us, Jesus' call probably looks more like going into deep water (doing something out of the norm) than completely leaving our jobs and lives. But surrendering to Jesus means our hearts should be prepared to do either of those things.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What do you remember about the first time you surrendered your life to Jesus?
2. Was it hard to give up your plans to follow Jesus? Why or why not?
3. What excuses have you used to avoid surrendering to Jesus?
4. What is the "deep water" Jesus has called you into?

Day 2 – The Rich Young Ruler

Mark 10:17-22

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 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.” ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Understanding the Passage:

It is clear from this story that the young man’s heart was in the right place. He began by calling Jesus “Good Teacher,” which was a sign of respect and an understanding of his authority. He asks about eternal life – a sure sign that he knows what he’s missing and wants to rectify it. He keeps all of the commandments. But it is also clear that he is missing a big piece of the puzzle.

The young man asks about how he might **inherit** eternal life. He points to his commandment keeping as proof that he deserves it. Both of those things imply that he thinks that as a law-abiding Jew who is a part of the covenant, eternal life is coming to him. He may have come to Jesus not looking for an answer, but for validation that he is on the right track. He is shocked when Jesus tells him it’s about more than observing the laws of Moses. Too often we say we want to follow Jesus, but when Jesus offers his terms, we reject them (and him). He didn’t understand that radical discipleship is about following Jesus, not following the rules.

This encounter is not about wealth – at least not always. It’s about revealing what we cherish the most. For some folks, the thing they cherish the most (and what they may have the most trouble surrendering) is wealth. For others, it may be their career, or the way people perceive them, or their children, or their appearance. Whatever it is, Jesus is asking us to let it go so we can fully focus on him.

The problem is that it’s much easier to have a clenched fist than an open palm. Once we’ve worked hard to obtain something, the idea of letting it go is often seen as absurd. This isn’t really a battle with Jesus; it is a battle waged in our own hearts. We authentically want to follow Jesus, but we want to do it alongside the other things we hold dear.

There is a line in this passage that is easy to miss on the first reading. In verse 21, it says, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him...” Jesus loved him. Jesus knew he would reject these terms but he loved him anyway. He continued to love him. We don’t know what happened to the rich young ruler after he walked away, but we know that he never lost the

opportunity to come back to Jesus. When we turn away from Jesus, it's not the end of the story.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What are you currently holding onto with a clenched fist that you need to let go of?
2. Are you using good (aka. law-abiding) behavior as a substitute for radical discipleship?
3. Do you feel grieved as the rich young ruler did when you know you've turned away from Jesus?
4. Close your time of study today with this prayer:

Compassionate One, you set before us the ways of life and death, giving us the very keys to eternal life, yet we turn away. The cost seems too high. We would show you perfect love, if we didn't have to give up our riches. We would offer you perfect devotion, if we didn't have to alter our selfish ways. We would present to you our very lives, if we could only do so in comfort. Left to ourselves, we are lost and alone. Forgive our reluctance to believe that with you, all things are possible, with you, we find our way home. Amen.
(Abingdon Worship Annual 2012)

Day 3 – A Tale of Two Followers

Matthew 8:18-22

¹⁸ Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. ¹⁹ A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ²¹ Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ²² But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Understanding the Passage:

This incident follows the Sermon on the Mount. After he delivered that message, Jesus went to Capernaum and performed a number of healings – at least one of which (the healing of the officer's servant) was very high profile. A large number of folks began to follow him, which is where this pericope picks up. Jesus saw the great crowds around him and told his disciples he wanted to go to the other side of the lake. The scripture doesn't say, but maybe he needed a respite or maybe he wanted to weed out the true followers.

Two men approach him, but with very different intentions, and each teaches us a lesson about surrender. The first man is a scribe, which was a significant position in ancient culture. He would have been well educated and would serve as an interpreter of Moses' law. Being well versed in the scriptures, he probably recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophets. He may have imagined that aligning himself with the Messiah would bring him power.

It was theoretically a win-win for both the scribe and Jesus, because adding the scribe to his followers would have been a boon to Jesus' ministry; it would have been an endorsement from the religious elite. But it is clear from Jesus' answer that he is not after the quantity of followers as much as the quality of their commitment.

Jesus' response seemed to intentionally discourage the scribe from following him. Instead of affirming certain success, Jesus tells the scribe that he doesn't even have a place to lay his head at night. He's homeless. The implication is that hitching a wagon to Jesus means that even though you'll experience eternal life, the road to get there may be hard. The scribe is an example of someone who has not fully counted the cost of surrendering to Jesus.

On the other hand, the second follower seems to be one that has counted the cost and is rethinking things. This man is described as "another one of his disciples," which means he is already a follower of Jesus'. Additionally, the command from Jesus to "follow me" is given in the present tense and can be translated as "keep following me." It's just now that Jesus is asking him to go across the lake – to leave his family, livelihood, and hometown – that he decides he has something more important to do. He says, "**first** let me go and bury my father." The implication is that he wants to follow Jesus, but it's not his priority.

Scholars disagree about whether his father is actually dead or not. The phrase "bury my father" could mean that he needs to fulfill his duties as a son until his father is dead. In the Complete Jewish Study Bible, the footnote says, "This does not mean that this would-be talmid [disciple] is traveling with Yeshua while his father's corpse is waiting at home, stinking in the sun. The father is not dead yet. The son wishes to go home and live comfortably until his father dies in the future."

This excuse wouldn't have actually been surprising to people around him as the fifth commandment, to honor thy father and mother (aka. to take care of your father and mother), was taken very seriously in Judaism. The fact that Jesus challenged him was the unexpected part of this story because it demonstrates that there is **nothing** that should come before surrendering to Jesus, regardless of what we've been taught.

When we consider our responsibilities, it seems that we can always find something "more" pressing than following Jesus. And the truth is, it is often our families that we hold up as an excuse to put Jesus second, especially because it's more honorable than putting Jesus behind our careers or aspirations or possessions or finances. By the very nature of its definition, we cannot have "priorities" – we can only have **a single** priority. We need to ask God to help us order our lives so that our priority is following Jesus.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Before you surrendered your life to Jesus, did you count the cost?
2. Do you identify with either of the followers?
3. Is there anything that you prioritize over Jesus? (i.e. possessions, relationships, health, security, finances, career, family)
4. Write a few sentences about how you think your relationship with Jesus would change if you put him first?

Day 4 – An Extravagant Anointing

Mark 14:3-9

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

John 12:1-8

¹ Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. ³ Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus’ feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume. ⁴ Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, ⁵ “This perfume was worth a year’s wages! Why wasn’t it sold and the money given to the poor?” (⁶ He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.) ⁷ Then Jesus said, “Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you won’t always have me.”

Understanding the Passage:

An account of a woman anointing Jesus with expensive perfume is included in each of the gospels. For many centuries, scholars have disagreed about whether the accounts are representative of one, two or three events. In Luke, the anointing happens in the north near the Sea of Galilee at the home of a Pharisee and Jesus does not mention his burial. The accounts in Matthew, Mark and John have many similarities – in fact, they are almost the same, save for two key details:

1. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is at the home of Simon the Leper and the woman’s name is not mentioned. In John, Jesus is at the home of Lazarus and the woman is identified as Mary, Lazarus’ sister.
2. In Matthew and Mark, “the disciples” criticize her. In John, it is specifically Judas who criticizes the woman’s extravagance.

Regardless of how many times the anointing happened, we have much to learn from the sacrificial love the women showed to Jesus.

The ointment was described in the two accounts as being worth 300 denarii or a year's wages. Those are two sides of the same coin: a denarius is a day's wages, which means 300 denarii would be equal to about a year's wages. In today's dollars, 300 denarii would be between \$30,000 and \$54,000 – a huge amount of money! Spikenard was a rare import to Israel as it comes from a plant that only grows in India and Nepal in the Himalaya mountains.

But it's not only the monetary value that makes her gift so extravagant. The jar of ointment may have been her dowry for marriage. It was common during Biblical times for the family of a young woman to purchase an alabaster container and fill it with a precious ointment to be used as part of her dowry. The long neck of the jar was sealed to prevent evaporation and the jar had to be broken open to get to the ointment – it was a one-time use item for a once-in-a-lifetime event. On the night of her wedding, she would break open the jar over her husband's feet to symbolize her devotion to him. By breaking this jar over Jesus' feet, it can't be used for anything else. It represents her complete devotion to Jesus.

Immediately after she anoints Jesus, the disciples (and specifically Judas in John) jump in to criticize her. They misunderstood and misjudged her intentions, but Jesus completely accepts her act of love and surrender. Surrendering to Jesus may look weird to the world – it may even be perceived as the wrong thing to do – but if it is done with an authentic heart, it will be celebrated by Jesus.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is the most extravagant gift you've ever given to someone? What did it feel like to give it?
2. If you could give something to Jesus, what would it be? Why?
3. Have you ever reacted like the disciples when you've seen an extravagant gift being given? What does that tell you about your heart?

Day 5 – The Virgin Mary

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For

nothing will be impossible with God.”³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Understanding the Passage:

If someone appeared to you unexpectedly and said, “do not be afraid” what would your gut reaction be? In spite of what the person said, it would probably be fear. Why would someone tell you not to be afraid if they don’t fully expect you to be afraid?

And Mary would have good reason to be afraid when she heard this news. In Leviticus 20:10, the law commands that adulterers be put to death. Mary had to have known that when she told Joseph that she was pregnant, he could choose to end their engagement and have her put to death. If he didn’t put her to death, she would have been used goods and not likely to have found another husband. She knew that she would be ostracized or rejected by her family.

It might actually be the words that precede “do not be afraid” that are more impactful in allaying Mary’s fears: “The Lord is with you.” It is the guarantee of companionship through the tough road ahead that helps Mary quickly respond, even though she stands to lose her future and possibly her life. You will notice that she goes from “how can this be” in v. 34 (with no mention of God) to the presence of the Holy Spirit in v. 35, to seeing God’s promises fulfilled with her cousin Elizabeth in v. 36-27, to “let it be” in v. 38. The promise of the Holy Spirit moves her from surprise to surrender.

She prefaces her assent by calling herself a servant of the Lord. She was already living under the authority of God, which made it easier for her to say yes. She did not have an “I am the boss of myself” attitude, which would have made it hard to submit to God’s plans. Because she was living as a servant, she was ready for this out-of-the-blue calling.

Letting go of our plans to follow God’s call, especially when that call is unknown or scary, is a hard thing to do. Its more natural for us to rebel against anything that isn’t our own plan. But just like God called a teenage Mary into an uncertain future, God calls all of us – just where we are right now – to surrender our certainty and follow Jesus wherever he leads us.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. If an angel appeared to you and shared an unexpected (and possibly unwelcome) plan for your life, how would you respond?
2. Is there a situation in which you’ve been struggling to believe that “nothing is impossible with God”?
3. What steps can you take to cultivate obedience and a spirit of surrender like Mary?

Video Questions:

1. When you hear the word surrender, what is your immediate reaction? Is it positive or negative?
2. What is the hardest thing in your life to surrender to God?

3. The basic question in a surrendered life is: are you letting God take control? Share with the group how you are doing with this.
4. How do you prioritize Christian self-surrender over the competing directive of American self-reliance?
5. What kind of gifts do you receive when you surrender? (i.e. surrender your tightly held plans and receive a surprise opportunity; surrender your selfishness and receive the opportunity to help someone else)
6. Which of the stories from scripture this week resonated with you the most? Why?

Close your group gathering with the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer:

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.