**Gospel:** Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” 16As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**Message: Now and Not Yet**

In all life there is a learning process. Animals in the wild teach their young how to survive in their environment: how to hunt, how to find shelter, how to maintain a den. There is a fox who has decided to make her home on the edge of my property. The burrow is a masterpiece of tunnels protected by undergrowth and branches where she can raise her kits in relative security. Even my cat has learned not to be curious around the kits; Mama Fox does not appreciate intruders. Humans over the eons have evolved similarly, first learning ways of survival, improving living conditions, and moving on to more complex cognitive functioning and technology. Babies learn to walk and talk, eventually learning to read and write. When one enters preschool or kindergarten, they don’t know it all, but there is potential to discover and learn much. Do children know at that early moment what they will be like or what they will be doing 15-20 years later? What are their strengths and talents? They are at the beginning of a process, a journey, filled with twists, turns and decisions.

Jesus calls his disciples, “Follow me”, and they do. **That** is a **moment—**a momentof decision. Those whom he calls, like what Jesus has said. Other than “Follow me” we can only surmise what he might have said about the Kingdom of God that attracted them. His words and his persona attracted the men (and the women who followed later) to **want** to be with him. Here is one who speaks of promise, of life in all fullness. No miracles had been witnessed yet, no healings, no feedings of thousands. It was simply good and pleasant to be with Jesus; he said some really cool stuff, and they wanted to be with him. Making the decision to follow Jesus is the **now**. Perhaps they imagined being the cheering section as he went about the area in Galilee. They’d be standing right up front with him as he shared his teaching about the Kingdom; they’d have the recognition of being Jesus’ close friends. But Jesus had other plans that included leaving the old self, the egocentric self behind. Jesus said, “I will make you become . . .” **Becoming** is a life-long process.

We make a **now** decision to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, one who hears the concepts of the teaching. We attend worship, gradually getting involved in the programs and missions. Perhaps we attend Sunday school or Bible study. We do not do all at once; we do not know all there is about the contents of scripture or inner workings of a denomination any more than that kindergartner can write a doctoral thesis. As disciples, we learn; we become a new person, taking on a new identity over time, learning our strengths and where/how we might serve God, to become who God wants us to be. We are *not yet* what we are to become. Our “Becoming” moves us forward to be more like Jesus, learning about Jesus, getting to know Jesus, growing closer to Jesus, learning to listen for Jesus, doing the works of Jesus. Discipleship is a long-standing commitment requiring fidelity (quality faithfulness), service, and sacrifice. That last term is a bit scary—sacrifice. Doing what Jesus does includes suffering. We could be found in some very uncomfortable situations—perhaps not as extreme as the cross, but we do give up what the world would call *our life—*things we want to do, paths we want to take*—*in order to serve. We risk stares and criticisms from those who choose against discipleship, who spurn/deny/scorn Jesus in favor of personal comfort or fear of the unknown. It’s easier on one’s conscience to make the other look like the bad guy. We may even risk hostilities when religious or political ideologies clash with Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor. We have experienced the anger and destruction, the demonstrations and looting in our own Western NY. We watch as people risk their lives to escape the poverty of one country for the promise or hope of opportunity in this/another country. We see in our own communities people struggling to find suitable and sustainable housing yet are so ill-equipped to survive in an environment that continuously works against them. Prisoners are released into a society that shuns them, businesses refusing to hire them, landlords refusing to rent to them, psychologists refusing to counsel them, refusing to help them become.

When a person in a now moment says “yes” to being a disciple, (s)he eventually will face reality head on recognizing the threatening forces around us that are beyond our control. We live Jesus’ warning that there will be wars and rumors of war, and so we are at this moment. We look to the up-coming election of “leadership” with skepticism. We face wild weather of ice, snow, floods; we experience physical health and mental health issues; moments of anticipation— Bills vs KC, all of which produce levels of anxiety that may or may not keep us awake at night to say the least, or cause physical and emotional distress at worst. Discipleship leads us to become more like Jesus who constantly put his complete trust in God. As the psalmist wrote, “For God alone my soul waits in silence.” Our silent waiting is not naive passivity. Trust in God in this risky world is to wait IN the Lord—IN God’s being IN whom we live and breathe—IN eager expectation. This is an invitation to a fresh epiphany. (I don’t know where I was, or where I read it, but miracles happen daily—at least 3 times daily. We are called to examine our days to find God in all we do, in all we see, in all we experience.)

Trust emanates from our faith. Faith is not an exercise of the mind. Faith is not an exercise of the mind, contemplating and working through the complexities of self, the world, ultimate conditions. Faith is located in the soul, that vibrant part of us that is life itself and our person. Faith allows us to orient our being in the grace of God, having had **our now**, and living into the **not yet**. Jesus said, “the kingdom of God has come near.” The Kingdom IS, but *not yet,* in our time/space continuum, completely fulfilled. What IS, is our attitude adjustment, moving to fully trust God over our own view, our own power.

Paul gave up everything to be “the least of disciples” while at the same time recognizing that the rest of us live in the world called to other purposes. Should one lose sleep wondering if getting married, Jesus would show up before the cake is cut? How do I not mourn the loss of a loved one? Is it too soon to rejoice and celebrate the coming of Jesus? For what are we rejoicing? I do like to eat; therefore, I’m going to *Wegma*ns or *Tops*. Do not let these aspects of life cause anxiety. We are in the world, but our energy is expended on becoming more like Jesus as we go about the living and breathing in this world. We focus on the holiness of our actions, living **in** God, trusting **in** God, allowing peace and prosperity to be of soul, union with the living God, rather than the material. The Kingdom of God is **now**, and **not yet**.

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Prayer**: Almighty god, you created us in your own image. Grant us grace fearlessly to contend with the world among us, to make no peace with oppression, to reverently use our freedom. Help us to employ your grace in the maintenance of justice, the promotion of health, the healing of the soul to the glory of your holy name through Christ our Savior who continues with us as we pray, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: Merciful and generous God, whose bounty we have received, accept this offering of your people. Remember in your love those who have brought it and those for whom it is given. Follow it with your blessing that these offerings may promote peace and goodwill among all peoples and advance the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Benediction**: God be in your head and in your understanding. God be in your eyes and in your seeing. God be in your mouth and in your speaking. God be in your heart and in your thinking. God be with you now and into eternity.

**Old Testament**: Jonah 3:1-10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. 4Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

5And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. 6When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. 9Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” 10When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

**New Testament**: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

29I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, 30and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, 31and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.