

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

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. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

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What if you could be in God’s dreams? Or better, what if you could actually *live out* God’s dream? Can you just imagine? What a world it would be if everyone on earth could see each other and all of creation exactly the way that God does. Imagine if we could just spontaneously love like God does now. There would be no racism, no sexism, no homophobia. No anti-Semitism, no Islamophobia, no fear or hatred for any people, and best of all, if we were living out God’s dream, there would be no sin.

Absolutely no separation from God. Think of it.

No reason to be afraid because we are eternally alive in God’s presence. No reason to be greedy because all of creation is freely given. No reason to be self-absorbed because we are whole and exactly as God created each of us to be. No reason for judgmental words and acts because, in our own wholeness and holiness, we are curious about each other’s differences and mindful that we are all God’s children united in the love of God.

And what if everyone who ever was and everyone who is and everyone who will ever be were all together with that same vision and that same wholeness and holiness, and that same unity with God? Imagine it.

“Tis still a dream,” as Posthumus Leonatus says in Shakespeare’s comedy, *Cymbeline*, “Tis still a dream or else such stuff as madmen tongue and brain not.” Now, much of the world will insist that what I have just described is exactly such stuff as madmen speak of without any thought. And, in many ways, it *is* still a dream.

But here's the thing: it is *God's* dream. This is the dream that God intended in calling creation into being. And Mark's Jesus refers to this dream as "the kingdom of God."

Mark's summary of the entire gospel comes in two sentences: first, a radical announcement, and then a two-part instruction for responding. Mark shows us how crucial these words are by sandwiching four brief phrases between two references to good news: Jesus comes to proclaim the good news of God, saying "The proper time has come and the Kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and trust in the good news."

The remaining sixteen chapters of the Gospel of Mark clarify and illuminate the meaning of these phrases. And for nearly 2,000 years, we have been exploring the mystery of God's dream for creation that is both here and yet still to come in its fullness.

Mark's Jesus announces that the kingdom of God already encroaches on our lives; that God's loving influence already stimulates and activates something planted deeply within us. Now, once again, our English translation is a thinner soup than Mark's Greek. The Greek word implies something far more dynamic than simply a static place where a king or queen rules. More verb than noun, as if Jesus means the "kingdoming" of God is near.

Jesus is not pointing to someplace else, like some otherworldly "heaven." Through Christ, God's reigning is taking hold right here on earth as God gathers, inspires and enculturates people to spread the good news of God's "kingdoming" activity. Jesus is also not proposing a utopian dream that can only be realized at some later *time*, like a spiritualized eternity in the afterlife. The proper time is also *right now*.

And so, as we go about the tasks and duties God gives us, we get a foretaste of the "not-yet-fully" in the "here-and-now."

God recruits followers to join in "kingdoming" by drawing people toward the spiritual consciousness and action of the near-at-hand dream of God. God gathers communities of people with varieties of vocations to encourage and to teach, to purge hatred and fear, and to serve wholeness.

People gather in response to God's dream of a holy and whole new identity for us, a holy and whole new life, a holy and whole new way of being. With our consent, God makes us become "fishers of people." And so, as we

go about the activities involved in showing people God's dream and giving God's heavenly realm to others, we see a glimpse of the dream as it will look in its fullness.

What that dream will look like in all its glory remains beyond our ability to comprehend, even with changed hearts and minds. And so, we trust the good news and let it be a mystery for now.

In the meantime, as that mystery continues to draw nearer, we rely on a dance between the grace-bestowing communion of community and the life-giving breathing space of solitude. These are the two resources that nurture our ability to find the specific gifts – the vocations –that God has given each of us and to bring them to fruition. We need both solitude and community by turns in our faith development.

All by itself, solitude can decay into loneliness or selfish isolation. Yet, without periods of solitude, community can become overpowering. The expectations, traditions and cultural patterns of our partnerships, families, workplaces or other social collectives can strengthen or overwhelm our ability to discern and explore who and what God has created us to be. Spouses, parents, bosses and, yes, even clergy, can support or flood our internal investigations.

We can even do the same with scripture.

We can romanticize the calling of Simon and Andrew, and James and John, by holding them up as heroes who dropped everything the first time that Jesus spoke to them. There is a subtle pressure in that interpretation implying that God expects every one of us to toss our entire lives, families and occupations aside. For many parts of the church, the universal invitation to participate in God's dream became a narrow call to what we call "religious life" as a priest, a deacon or a monastic sister or brother.

The truth is that it is highly unlikely that Jesus and the four fishermen were completely unknown to each other. Even if this was the first time that Simon, Andrew, John and James had met Jesus in person, they would surely have been aware of each other's activities through the extremely active gossip networks of first century Palestine.

And Jesus did not go to Capernaum randomly. He went to a major city at the crossroads of the known world to look for certain people in a position to

join him in a common venture. He did not casually choose these four fishermen.

Fishing was a challenging occupation that required fishing families to hire day laborers. Despite being a major industry, first-century records show that payment was often irregular and inadequate, and the taxes for fishing rights were unfairly high. And so, Jonah and Zebedee, the fathers of the four young men, took a short-term gamble. *If Jesus could deliver*, the faction forming around him might solve some long-term issues of livelihood. Both families chose loyalty to Jesus as a flexible and calculated extension of their loyalty to each other.

This more realistic and practical interpretation is also a bit more challenging. Where the romantic interpretation makes heroes out of the four boys, it also provides a reasonable way out for those of us who don't feel like superheroes. The more feasible interpretation means that, in the call to holiness, God invites all people to engage God's dream from their actual circumstances. God provides what we need to make God's love manifest in what we are doing right now.

Part of what God provides to us is what the two fishing families experienced in Jesus: clarity of vision and purpose. Regardless of our existing commitments, that same clarity is available for all of us. Not the kind of single-minded clarity that makes people unaware or disdainful of other people. Not the unwavering clarity of self-aggrandizing achievement.

Holy clarity is always braided together with compassion for all of God's people and creation.

We pursue holy clarity through the practices and moments of solitude, always returning to communion and dialogue with other people. Solitude is being intentionally and prayerfully present to God and alone with God. Practices of solitude create in us tranquil centers of unity and depth, as we reach toward inner freedom.

Holy solitude moves us beyond self-concern, enhances our awareness and deepens our communion with each other. We reach so deeply into ourselves that we can release our grip on our own souls, and our lives begin enriching other lives, which in turn, enriches our own.

Through solitude, we reach out to God in prayerful dialogue using words and silences, images and emotions. Through communion, we reach out to God in each other. And God's dream becomes more and more real in communities of mindful, intentional and purposeful people.

We live as though we trusted that the dreams of God for all creation are not only possible, but have already come near.

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