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Mark 1:14-20  
Epiphany 3  
24 January 2021

So here we are, at the beginning of another year, the beginning of a new presidency for the United States and here I am beginning my first sermon at St Matthews!

And beginning is what the Gospel today is all about. Jesus begins his public ministry. Simon, Andrew, James and John begin their journey as disciples.

So let's look a little closer at beginnings. What is it about them? Why are they so difficult? Why do we resist and fear the change beginnings require? What allows us to begin something, to take the first step in a journey? How do we find the courage to begin?

How do we know what we are called to begin, what should we devote our energies to?

When we begin something we can't be certain that we will succeed. We move forward in the hope we will succeed, that our actions will be meaningful and will have the desired result.

But succeeding is not necessarily the most important thing anyway. And we can define success for ourselves. Success might mean starting out with a plan but when we find that our plan doesn't fit with reality, being flexible enough to change our plans. Success might actually be just getting started, taking the first step out the door like Simon and Andrew or James and John.

Check out the energy with which they begin too. No mucking around. As soon as they hear Jesus' call, they *immediately* leave their nets and follow Jesus. Are they sure what they are going off to? Do they know what Jesus means when he says he will make them fishers of people? I don't think so, but something about Jesus' call coupled with his proclamation that God's Kingdom had arrived and the time had come to repent and believe in the good news was enough for them to begin.

The change Jesus calls us to make, the beginning he calls us to, involves being completely transformed, tipping our priorities on their head. It's a call to begin something that will likely be costly, demanding and even dangerous. The four disciples leave their jobs as fishers. James and John leave more than just jobs, they leave a fishing boat and a business owned by their father which they stood to inherit. The venture they set off on is high cost and high risk.

Like the four disciples, we don't know quite where we'll end up, how much further or deeper we will have to go. We're not sure we're up to it really. We're tired, busy, over-committed. We're overfed, excessively cushioned yet always on the hunt for more comfort and less exertion. And Jesus is calling us away from this, calling us to risk it all. Calling us to transform and to be transformed.

I've been reading books by an American feminist writer, Rebecca Solnit.<sup>1</sup> She says that beyond every beginning is another beginning, and another and another.<sup>2</sup>

That makes sense to me because we can't know everything about what we are venturing into when we begin. In the end, as Solnit says, "we always act in the dark. The effects of our actions may unfold in ways [we] cannot foresee or even imagine. They may unfold long after [our] death."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me*, Haymarket, Chicago, 2014 and *Recollections of My Non-Existence*, Granta, London, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Recollections of My Non-Existence*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Men Explain Things to Me*, 86.

Some more from Rebecca Solnit. She points out that Laurence Gonzales in *Deep Survival* describes a plan, as a memory of the future, something we try on to see if it fits reality.<sup>4</sup> That makes my head spin - quite a lot - but it underscores the need for flexibility, the importance of being able to 'pivot' in today's parlance. We have to be able to adjust for the unexpected, the unknown and the possibility that the plan is not fit for purpose.

So the fact that we don't know what will happen next is not good reason for holding back. In fact not knowing what will happen next could actually be grounds for hope because unlikely and wonderful things may spring out of that not knowing.<sup>5</sup> So let's not hold back just because we can't be certain of the outcome. Let's push forward

And what should we, the people of St Matthew's, begin? One plan is already made - to develop our digital platform and use it to extend our influence. But let's not stop there. What else can we begin? In the reading today Mark suggests that we should focus on people - the fishermen are called to be fishers of people. People are at the heart of it all. Who are the people calling to us? And we shouldn't forget the urgency of beginning because the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. It's right here and now!

This gospel reading is telling us that the thinking and talking and planning we are so good at St Matthew's is not enough. We have to begin, to get moving, to act. We have to leave our fishing boats and find the people who need us to accompany them.

If we look at the world through God's eyes, who is calling out to us for our attention, who is calling us to begin walking with them?

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<sup>4</sup> Laurence Gonzales, *Deep Survival* in *Men Explain Things to Me*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Men Explain Things to Me*, 87-88.