

Have You Given All For Jesus?

Mark 1:18

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I have a great sermon which I will deliver next Sunday but God has just made it clear or confirmed really to me that I should go just with the Holy Spirit. So he just gave me the piece to read a moment ago and I'd like you to turn to it please and then we'll just trust him to speak to us, Mark 1:16.

Mark 1:16, "And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him." You can see there was a lot of net mending going on there, everybody that Jesus passed were mending nets. And then the verse that God put in my heart is the one in verse 18, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

I think it's obvious to all of us in America that church going is much more popular here than in the rest of the world. And there are churches everywhere in America. And I think if you look at some of them on television, you'll see that some of them are massive and are crowded with people. And it is very easy in this kind of atmosphere to create a form of following Jesus that is comfortable and that fits in with our own activities and the plans we have for our own lives. But it may well be a counterfeit of true following of Christ and yet the great danger of it is that huge numbers of us are involved in it and the further danger is that we're involved in saying many true things in the midst of it. For instance all of us in some way or other read this Book, all of us sing the old hymns, all of us pray prayers and so it is very easy in such an atmosphere to get used to coming to church and thinking this is what God wants me to do because it has a great deal of truth in it.

It's just that the crucial point where that verse cuts across it, it fails.

And you remember that verse runs, "And leaving their nets, immediately they left their nets and followed him." It's very easy in our kind of church going atmosphere not to leave your nets and yet to try to follow him. And so what a lot of us end up doing is, "I want to follow you but my foot's caught in my net and I can't get it out. Yeah, I really do want to get it out. Oh, I wish I could get this foot out of this net but I can't get it out", so we end up following Jesus with a limp. In other words, we're a little like lame duck disciples. We kind of appear to be following him but not really wholly, not with our whole hearts.

Now the further danger, loved ones, is that we ourselves here this morning could comfort and encourage each other to do that. It is possible to do that, you know. It is possible to get together and so enjoy being together and so love each other that we just comfort each other in that half-following of Christ. I feel it of course especially in these days because - not all of you know but some of you know -- that we have had exciting years in this church over the past two or three years and you all have been just magnificent. You've been just so faithful and really what I should do is be nice to you. You've been so nice to me but that's not my calling, my calling by God is to continue to present to all of us, including myself, the full call that God has given us through Christ.

Loved ones, that call is not simply to run a church. You know I think that we could run a much better church than we do now. You just kind of switch the preaching a little and you'd enlarge the choir, and you'd share the little money around and before you'd know it, we'd have a massive church again. But loved ones, that isn't what God is calling us to. The Lord Jesus is calling us to leave our nets and to follow him. Not to comfort each other in a kind of controlled surrender, not to comfort each other in a kind of pseudo Christianity or a pseudo churchianity, but he is calling us to leave our nets and follow him. That's really what I want to bring before you. The Holy Spirit is good to us, he kind of whumps me with this, maybe every six weeks or so, so you don't have to face me battering on you every week. But at times like this, I know the Lord wants me to bring it home to you clearly again.

Jesus has given his whole life for you, his whole life for you. Jesus has died his death for you. Now, it is no answer to him even to give a tithe. I mean it's good to give a tithe, but big deal you know it's no answer just to give a tithe. The Lord Jesus, the Son of the God who made you and me, has given his life for you. He died for you and me. He went to hell for you and me. He took the worst of your sin unto himself and he allowed his Father to burn it out of existence and to give him a sense that he was utterly forsaken.

In other words, if Jesus hadn't died for you there'd come a moment after death when there'd be absolute darkness and desolation around you. And because of the sin that you have in your life, because of the selfishness, the uncleanness over the years, the lying or the deception, even if you are very good now compared with what you were, still some of the selfishness that is in you, if you had at that moment after death, that all inside you, then there would be such a sense of desolation and loneliness and outer darkness and coldness that you would absolutely collapse into hell, hopelessly in despair.

Now, Jesus did that for you. He went through that moment of death with your sin in his own heart and he bore that terrible moment of God's forsakenness when he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou, (of all people, my Father) forsaken me (your only begotten son, the one who is without sin?)." And the answer was always because God made him to be sin who knew no sin. Now Jesus bore that for you and me. See, he died for you and me. He gave up his whole life for you and me. Loved ones, you know you cannot sit there, you cannot sit there and see him trailing down that Calvary road bleeding to death and then going to hell for you and then quietly and complacently get up from here at the end of the service and go on and get on with your own life and then come back and give him an hour and give him a tithe. You know what it means.

It means you owe your whole life to him. You know me too. I'm in the same boat. We owe our whole life to Jesus. We don't owe just a little bit of suffering, or a little bit of hardship or a little bit of popularity or unpopularity or a little bit of unhappiness. We owe everything to Jesus. I mean I am saying to you I am with you, we have to look to him here and we have to say, "We owe you everything, there's nothing we don't owe you. We owe you our whole lives. Anything less than our whole lives is bargain hunting." Anything less than our whole lives is the Daisy sale at Dayton's, it's an attempt to get a good deal. It's not honesty and of course, you know what the Lord is saying to you today, "Are you really forsaking your nets?"

Actually, when I look around -- because I see some of you and I know the love in your hearts -- the issue actually isn't not living in Bloomington or not living in Richfield, that's not the deal. I think for some of us that is the deal. But the deal, in other words, I am not saying to you all,

"Get up and leave and go to London or get up and leave and go to Germany or go to Africa or go to India." I think maybe some of you are being called to do that. But that isn't the issue. The issue is "have you given your whole life to Jesus wherever you're going to live it?" He won't want us all to go to Africa or India. He won't want us all to go out of America. On the other hand he won't want us all to stay here. But the issue is, have you given your life to Jesus and said, "Lord, whatever you want me to do with my life, I will do, I will do. I will not be part of that group of spectators who clap you as you walk down the Calvary road and give you money each Sunday to thank you for it. I will not be like that. I will lift up my own cross and I will walk down my Calvary road to whatever that costs." And that is what Jesus is saying to us this morning through this verse, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Your nets are what you're caught up in and entangled with, that's it. Your nets are what are catching your feet. I mean with the disciples, they were the means of earning their money. With us, our means of earning our money often becomes the things that entangle us. They become our nets. We're caught up in a thousand impossibilities. Well, I have shares in IBM, what would happen to them? Well, I have a retirement plan. What would happen to that?

Now I ask you, can you ask any good Westerner to give up their retirement plan, can you? I mean, who would look after me? And then we go on and on and on. If you men and women who have received education are like me, I was faced with my parents saying, "You have got a good education. You ought to use it to make good money and make a good living for yourself." And so we find that our education becomes a net that entangles us. And of course, we want to rise to that, it appeals to us. Of course, we have got a good education, but the Lord gave you a good education to do the same with it as he did with his position with the Father. "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled himself even onto death, death on a cross."

Do you see you can't live with that Lord and have done less than that? You see that. I mean, let me just put it to you humanly, you'd feel uncomfortable, you'd feel uncomfortable. I mean you just wouldn't feel right in heaven. You just wouldn't feel right. I mean they're all -- and dear love them they won't be -- but you know they're showing their scars, and you're sitting there with your clean hands, and not a mark on you. It can't be. Those of us who believe in the crucified one, we have to take up our cross and we have to follow in whatever that means.

Of course, my job this morning is not to tell you what that means because I don't know what it means for you. I don't know what it means for you, or for you, or for you, or for you, I don't, that's not my job. That's the job of the Holy Spirit to tell you that, but he can only tell you it if you have determined that you will not live a controlled surrendered life but you will give everything to your Lord Jesus. It will be life for life and the reason for that is that in Christianity, the truth is, it's all or nothing. That's the truth.

It's really all or nothing. You know you may say to me, "Now Pastor, some people seem to get a good deal. Some people seem to just live an ordinary life and make all the money they want and just take care of themselves and they go to church on Sunday and life looks pretty nice." Loved ones, it's all or nothing. If you don't give all, you end up with nothing. You end up with only a pretence or an imitation of Christianity. And it may look good on the outside but it has nothing of the certainty or the confidence that God witnesses within through his Holy Spirit.

It is all or nothing and I encourage you especially in these days to make absolutely sure that you

are giving all. Now why do I say that? Because you know all the stuff about the last days, you know it. I don't need to tell you. You know that in the last days, people will have the form of religion but not the power of it. You know that in the last days, things will become blacker and whiter, they actually will. Things will become blacker and whiter, it is not chance, whatever explanation you want to give about AIDS and everybody seems to have their own explanations. It's obvious from that, and from the terrorists' activity, that things are beginning to break apart. They're beginning to move apart. Even those of us who say, "Oh, there have always been great communications, oh people have always, there have always been rumors of wars and wars, oh there have always been earthquakes." Even those of us who try to rationalize it all, we have to bow down to the fact that there are an incredible number of wars now. There are an incredible number of earthquakes now. There is a tremendous sense of communication so that everybody in the world knows exactly what is happening everywhere and there is an increasing feeling that we are not able to control it all.

The world does not feel a more secure place now, does it? It doesn't. You're able to dial a certain number and you'll get the police in a moment, you'll get a heart attack unit immediately at your door, but we don't feel more secure, do we? We feel less secure now than we ever did. We know exactly what is happening everywhere in the world. We have magnificent missiles that we can send anywhere to destroy anybody but we don't feel more secure. The whole world feels more and more shaky than it ever did.

Loved ones, these are the days when counterfeit religion comes in. These are the days when there will rise up a Christianity that has an appearance of Christ's gospel but does not have the sacrifice and surrender of Christ's gospel. And I would ask you "where is your life this morning? Have you surrendered everything to him?" You know what that means. And you know if you're sitting there and thinking, "Do you mean give up my car, give up my money?", it's usually not those things, it's usually not the things. It's the attitude of your heart. Is Jesus everything to you? Have you given your whole life to him? If he said "Tomorrow, I want you to go to Africa or I want you to go to India, or I want you to give up your present way of life. I have something for you to do in the mountains in Kentucky or in the mountains in the Appalachians", then would you do that? Would you obey Jesus? Or are you trying to work the Lord into your plan and your program?

In other words, all of us are in a very real situation this morning. We are all gathered here to thank a man for giving up His life for us. And now I am suggesting to you that there is only one real thanks that you can give that is appropriate to such a sacrifice. And wasn't it one of the old, I think it was Papious; it was one of the old saints you remember in the early church. And he was being burned at the stake and he was 86 or 87 and they said, "Have you anything to say?" and he said, "I have served my master these eighty and six years and after what he has done for me, there is no sacrifice too great that I could make for him."

Well, those are the guys that will be in heaven. See? It's not by being like them that we'll get into heaven but I am using that to say to you that there is only one appropriate response to what you and I see Jesus has done for us. And that is to bow before him and say, "Lord Jesus, I give my whole life to you. Whatever you want me to do, I will do. You just tell me." Loved ones, that's I think what the Father wanted me to share with you so that we would not be involved, any of us, in just a kind of nicey-nice religion or a nice little bit of church going but we would be real.

That's the most important thing. There will come a day when you're not able to hear anybody speak to you. There'll come a day when you're not with any of us, you're on your own and then at that moment, it will be important to know inside in your heart that you didn't sidestep Jesus but you faced him

straight on and you gave him life for life. It's really up to you what you want to do, I think it would be good if you feel that God has spoken to you then that you'd go to the altar during the last hymn and give your life to him and then go back to your seat. But really, we'll just sing a hymn through once and it's just your opportunity to do it if you want to privately and I would encourage you to do what God tells you this morning.

I would think it would be good to sing that hymn "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross", you remember that verse "Were the whole realm of nature mine, it were a present far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all". It's number 147 loved ones and let's stand as we sing and as we're singing, if you feel there's a declaration that you need to make privately to God, you should just come up and make it at the altar and then return.