



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“What You Talking About Jesus”

Mark 1:16-20

September 17, 2017

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Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, OH

Thank you for the invitation to allow me to come from Atlanta, Georgia to Columbus, Ohio. I came into town yesterday and got to the hotel and I saw a sea of red. I didn't know if the Rapture had come . . . I didn't know what happened

There's a football team in this town, a college in this town, and they lost last week, so you all are real happy this week. So thank you for allowing me to come and have an opportunity to practice my preaching

This morning we're talking about miracles because I'm a black Baptist preacher, if you did not notice, from Atlanta, Georgia, and in my church round about 30 minutes into my sermon, I'm just getting warmed up. They told me this morning that I had about 15 minutes to preach and so I texted a few deacons at my church and said, “God still works miracles. I preached a 15 minute sermon.” So we'll do 17 minutes at this worship experience.



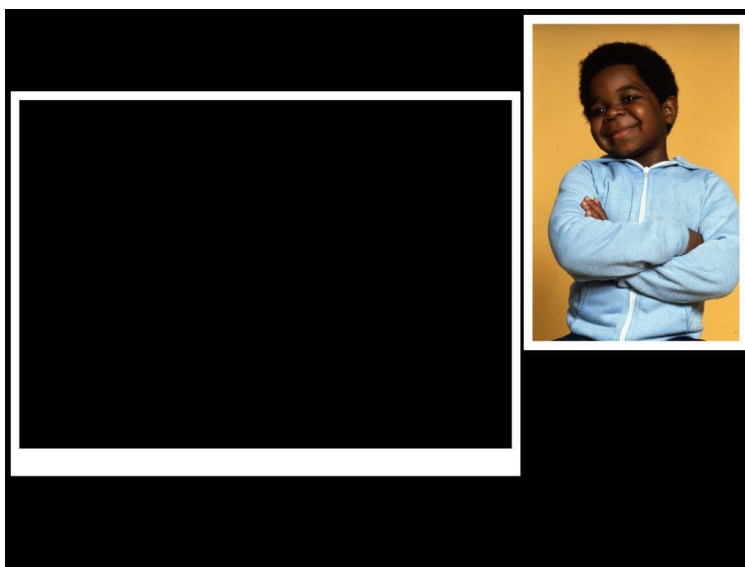
I don't know if you remember the show *Different Strokes*, but I do! This was one of my favorite TV shows . . . the show was aired from 1978 to 1986.

The show starred the little mischievous Gary Coleman as Arnold. He had a big brother, Willis, and they had been adopted by Mr. Drummond. Mr. Drummond had a daughter, her name was Kimberly, and I thought they were the cutest little family in the world.

Arnold's signature line was, “What you talking about Willis?” Some of you may remember it, some of you may be too young to remember it, and some might need your memories jogged a little. Let me play this short

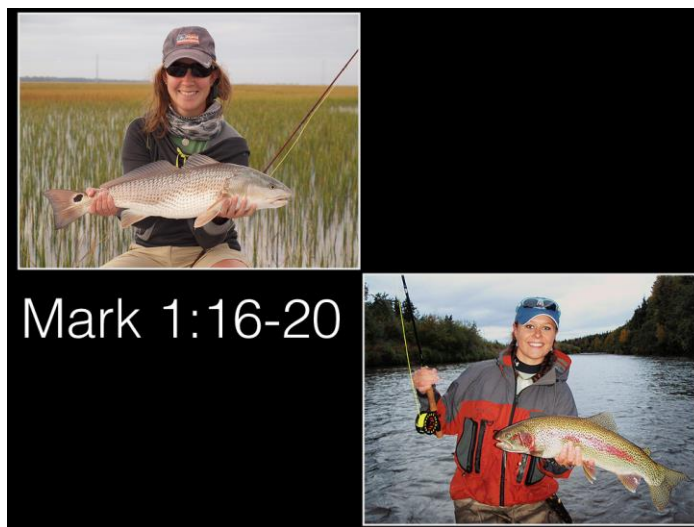
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clip from the show to remind us how Arnold used to engage Willis with this great one liner, “What you talking about Willis” . . .



I can only imagine in this text as Jesus comes up to these fishermen and looks them in the eye and says to them, “Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of people. . . .”

Somebody at the gathering had to say to Jesus, in the recesses of their mind, “What are you talking about Jesus?”



This text is about fish, fishing and becoming something different, something new. This text is about doing something we have never done before

This text is about being willing to follow Jesus in uncertain times and allowing God to make us anew, all over again.

These characters in this this text had been trained to be fishermen.



They knew how to fish. They knew what bait to use and now they were being called to do a new thing.

They had been trained by their fathers to be fishermen. They were working in the family business, pretty well off, and here comes Jesus.

You know when Jesus shows up, Jesus has a way of upsetting some stuff. So here comes Jesus and, if we picked up a few verses prior to our reading, we would see that Jesus came to Galilee preaching. I want to believe that these men, Simon, Andrew, James and John, had heard Jesus' preaching.



They had heard about Jesus, and when their eyes meet Jesus' eyes, Jesus says to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." The text says, "immediately they left their nets and followed him."

At first blush we can look over the net dropping, but the net dropping is one of the keys to this text to me.

These men were comfortable . . . these men were trained to be fishermen . . . these men were set up for life, but had to drop the very symbol of their comfort to follow Jesus.

Think about this, they leave their symbols of status and comfort to follow Jesus. They leave their symbols of status and comfort to follow Jesus . . . to do something that they had no idea of what he was even talking about.

Think about this . . . they're being called to follow Jesus, which means they're not only leaving their profession, but they're also leaving their religious tradition. They're leaving all of this to follow Jesus and there's nothing in their context to make sense of the call.

Jesus says, "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of people."

Now I told you all earlier, I'm a Baptist preacher from down south. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia. I'm Earlene and Ralph's baby child. My brother and sister don't know that I'm also my mother and father's favorite child.

But I'm also my mother and father's crazy child. And it's just that I like to do stuff that's a little to the left or to the right. I'm not one of these mainstream kind of guys. If you allow me to use my imagination, I can see me walking into the house and telling my momma and daddy, "I'm gonna follow Jesus and fish for people."

Now the text says that they left Zebedee, and I'm sure Zebedee was married to Mrs. Zebedee. And I can see me going and telling my momma, "I'm gonna follow Jesus and fish for people." She would probably look at me and say, "Boy, I know you crazy in the first place. What's wrong with you, going to follow Jesus, this religious zealot, and fish for people? That don't even make no sense."

And I can see my momma look at my daddy, and my daddy say, "I told you, that boy . . ."

So I'm assuming that the family probably didn't readily receive this call that they received from Jesus.

But the key is, when Jesus says follow me and I will make you, they were willing to follow and then go trust God in the "making process!" They listen to God's voice over the voice of the opposition.

I don't know about you, but maybe you have this thing down, but the leaving of comfort to be uncomfortable and to be remade into something I've never been before is a bit intimidating for a middle-aged man from down south, from a city called Atlanta, Georgia, but they do it.

This story challenges me. It challenges me because I believe God is still walking along the seashore, calling out to us.

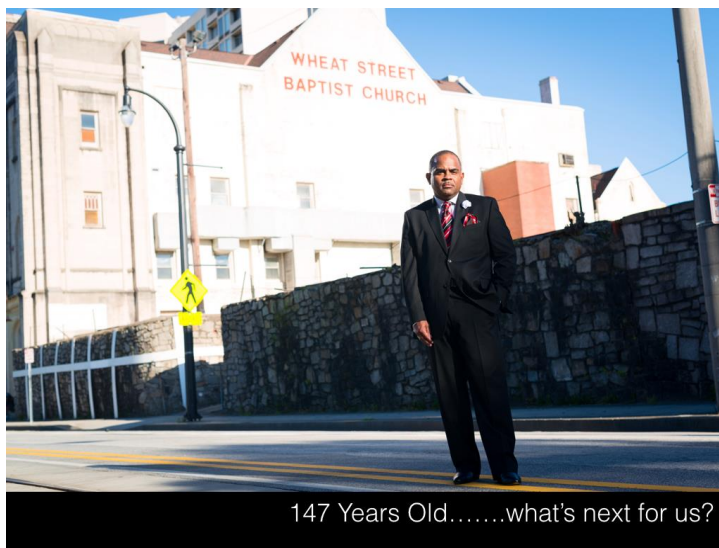
I believe God is still calling us to follow God and allow God to make us something new in times like this.

I believe that God is saying to us, "Drop your net . . . see, you can't fish for people with a net."

While what you have been will inform what you will become, you can't become that thing God is calling you to become until you drop your net.

Now I don't know what it is God is calling you to do. I don't know what God is calling this church to do. But I do believe God is calling each of us to take following Jesus seriously and I want to argue that when you

follow Jesus, Jesus will challenge you to drop your net and become that very new thing that God's calling you to be that you can't be until you drop your net and commit to following Jesus.



I pastor the historic Wheat Street Baptist Church, and whenever your church has in front of its name “the historic,” when you become the new pastor, all of a year, of the historic Wheat Street Baptist Church . . . well. I’m the seventh pastor in their 147-year history. The pastor before me pastored 26 years, the pastor before him pastored 52 years. I’m the new pastor of one year, and I’m praying to God when I get back, they’ve not voted me out.

But we at the 147-year-old Wheat Street Baptist Church realize God is calling us to do a new thing. It does not mean that we don’t remember our past, but we embrace our present.

What I know is God is calling God’s church to be remade because the church makes a real difference in the world.

The church can’t stand to be irrelevant. If we die, the conscience and soul of our city dies. If we die, the conscience and soul of our city dies.

What we know at Wheat Street is that we have to live, not for the sake of our legacy, but for the sake of our city’s future.

In Atlanta, where we are situated in the city, it’s the growing part of the city and people are coming in and property values are going up. And in our city, they’re trying to kick the poor people out of the inner city. But we’re saying at Wheat Street as long as we’re there, all of God’s people will be in that part of the city.

(If I were home, they’d say Amen! Say Amen, make me feel like I’m at home! There you go, you’re making a Baptist preacher happy!)

See what we know at Wheat Street is that we have to live, not for the sake of our legacy, but for the sake of our city’s future.

We are in the center of the city and we are at the center of the city with the city in the center of our heart. And we know that if we are not there, the very conscience of our city would be lost. So we have to live, we have to thrive, and if we're going to live and going to thrive, we have to change.

I don't know about you all, but for me, change is difficult. It's hard to change. My wife and I moved from California to Atlanta a few years ago. I came back home. And I found in the new house I was going to the old cabinets in the old house, but the stuff that was in the new house was in the cabinets, not in the old house. Stuff has to change.

A matter of fact, I pay all my bills now online. We had a storm down south a couple of days ago. Internet went down for a whole day. I thought I was going to die that whole day. I couldn't watch TV, couldn't go on Facebook, couldn't answer email, couldn't use the telephone. I said, "Lord Jesus, please come back today; today, not tomorrow."

Change is difficult, but if we're going to thrive and survive and make a difference, we must be different. We have to embrace change.

Simon, Andrew, James and John had to go through a complete reorientation as to what it meant to fish. They had to submit to a new way of being and existing.



They went from sitting on the dock of the bay, and watching the tide just roll away. They went from sitting on the dock of the bay, as Otis Redding would say, to walking the dusty streets of the city.

As I prepare to take my seat (and tell all my members at Wheat Street that I preached a twenty-minute sermon!), I want to say to you this morning that I think the church is called to a complete reorientation as we live in a world that has changed so drastically over the last twenty years.

We are called to change as our world changes at an alarming rate.

If the church doesn't adapt to be a church in the present age, the church as we know it will die.

I flew up from down south to encourage you to see what God is doing in the world.

I flew up from Atlanta, down south, to ask you to consider what it means to make disciples in the visual world.

I flew up from down south, from Atlanta, to ask you to seek God and God's wisdom as to what it looks like to be the church in the networked age, in the visual age.



See, God calls us to be faithful. And to be faithful demands that we change.

Those disciples, to be faithful, had to say, "Lord, I will follow you and allow you to change me when I don't want to be changed."

We make changes because God calls us to make changes.

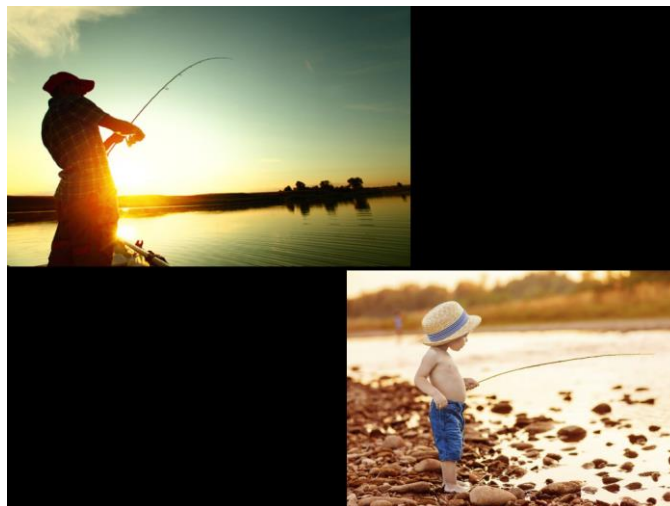
God so loved the world that God sent God's only son. Because God loved, because God is love, and we who are called by God to love, love the same world that God loved.

And because we love, we love this world and the people in this world enough to change so that we can reach them.

We are all called by that God of love to also love the world.

We are called by that God of love to share the love of God with the world.

So because of the power of love we go and we share this wonderful Gospel for the Gospel's sake.



Let me end by asking you to ask yourself three questions:

1. What is your net; what is our net or nets?
2. Are we willing, like these disciples, to drop our nets?
3. If not, why not? If so, when are we going to drop those nets?

Now I know some of you looked at Arnold and you looked at me and you said, “You know, Ralph, you look a lot like Arnold.”

My wife told me before I came from Atlanta, down south, to Columbus, she said, “You’re short and you’re cute.”

And I said, “You know what, baby, I agree with you. I’m just like Arnold. I’m short and I’m cute, but I’m not Arnold. I’m just an old-school Baptist preacher, who’s been trained in Presbyterian schools, who happens to teach at Columbia Theological Seminary, who happens to pastor at the oldest church in the city of Atlanta, and I just came up here to say to you what I think those disciples said to Jesus:

“What you talking about Jesus?”

What is God saying to you? What is God calling you to change? What is God calling you to be? And what is God calling you to do?

No, I’m not Arnold. I am Ralph Watkins and that is the first time in my life that I’ve ever preached a nineteen-minute sermon.