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## *What Were They Thinking?*

**A sermon by Canon George Maxwell**  
**Epiphany 3 – Year B**

The Gospel of Mark starts fast.

There is no genealogy, no Annunciation, and no stories of Jesus's childhood.

It's just the words of Isaiah and then an adult Jesus. He is baptized by John and then recognized by his Father and then led immediately by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested.

He comes back announcing that "The Kingdom is near," walks by the Sea of Galilee, sees fishermen, and calls them.

They drop everything and follow him.

It is at this point that I want to say, "Wait. Stop. What were they thinking?"

I mean, why aren't they thinking, "Who is this guy anyway? And what does he expect me to do about Dad and the boat, my living and my friends?"

What were they thinking?

If you want to know what they were thinking, it's helpful to know what everybody else around them was thinking. They were living in a time full of ideas of rebellion and revolt.

Since the Babylonian Exile, the prophets had been proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one who would come from the House of David, and come to restore the glory of the nation of Israel, bring back Jews from all over the earth, restore a sense of Torah—the law—and ultimately usher in the marvelous peace of God.

This was the currency of the day.

This is what people were thinking about and talking about and dreaming about.

There were even plenty of pseudo-messiahs wandering around.

There was a man called the Egyptian. He appeared in the desert, announced that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would come tumbling down. He amassed four thousand followers who gathered in the desert to prepare to march on the city. His ministry ended when he and all of his followers died at the hands of Roman soldiers sent into the desert by the governor to quell the rebellion.

Four basic groups emerged out of all of this

The Sadducees were the theological conservatives. They thought that as long as they could keep performing the rituals in the Temple, everything would be okay. The Messiah would still come. In fact, they thought that Herod might be the Messiah. As long as the functioning of the Temple was preserved, they had no problem accommodating themselves to a

foreign political power.

The Pharisees focused on the Torah. They thought that the key to preparing for the coming of the Messiah was the strict observance of the law.

The Zealots were willing to fight for social justice. They turned to violence as the way to deal with Rome.

The Essenes sought to avoid all contact with those they considered impure. They retreated into the desert to wait for the coming of not one but two Messiahs.

It's interesting, though. There is a common thread running through all four of these groups.

They all believed that a Messiah would come, and they all believed that the Messiah would be from the House of David, would gather together the Jews who had been driven to all other parts of the world, would found a nation based on the Torah, and would bring to all the marvelous peace of God.

But, if this is what the fishermen were thinking, they would soon learn that Jesus was not this kind of messiah.

It's not long before Jesus rebukes Peter by calling him Satan because Peter refused to believe that the Messiah would have to suffer and die on the cross.

And, it's not long before the voice of God corrects Peter, James, and John when they thought they could capture the glory of Jesus's transfiguration on the mountain by building booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Yet, they didn't go back. They kept following Jesus, ultimately to unimaginable places. John, homeless, in Patmos died, and Peter, head-down, was crucified.

They didn't go back, because they weren't motivated by what they were thinking.

They were motivated by what they were feeling

With all apologies to cognitive psychology, I think it's what's in our heart that moves us. It's what we yearn for, what we desire. Love, fear, hatred, and anger. These are the things that move us.

We rarely think our way into a different way of life; we are drawn into a different way of life.

We may think about it afterwards, but we are moved by how we feel about it.

These desires were called affections during the Great Awakening of the nineteenth century. They were considered to be the "springs of action" that moved us into faith. They moved us then, and they move us now.

There was something about Jesus that drew people to him.

Nathanael is teaching under a fig tree. He feels known by Jesus and is moved to pay attention.

A woman is drawing water from a well at midday when she shouldn't be there. She feels known by Jesus and is moved to pay attention.

Zacchaeus is watching from up in the sycamore tree. He feels known by Jesus and is moved to pay attention.

In each of these stories, Jesus stirs the heart of someone he seemingly meets by chance and draws them to him. They feel as if he knows them and they are moved to pay attention to him.

I think this is because they have become unexpectedly vulnerable.

Thinking is often a way of avoiding vulnerability.

Consider what happens when we try to think our way into becoming a better person.

One of two things invariably happens: either, one, we become so frustrated and so exhausted that we just quit; or, two, we

don't quit, we become resentful. We try harder and harder to be better and better, and when other people don't notice how hard we are trying, we resent it.

Compare that to what happens when we are face to face with someone who seems to know us and to accept us.

Our old way of being is exposed as something that is holding us back. We are drawn out of the way we used to be and into the way that promises a new kind of life. There is a connection that calls us toward something larger, the marvelous peace of God.

Now, fortunately, we are not standing beside Peter, Andrew, James, and John on the shore of the Sea of Galilee as Jesus walks by.

Most of us are not faced with having to make the decision to follow some stranger at the cost of our jobs and families.

And yet, we do face some similar choices.

When you get up in the morning, all of the anxieties of the day are already waiting on you. If you're like me, by the time you look into the mirror in the bathroom, their voices have already started.

They're always saying the same things.

"Do you remember all of the things you have to do today? Don't forget what you forgot to do yesterday? Apologize to this person. Settle the score with that person. You know there's not time for even half of this!"

And this is all before your first cup of coffee!

If you let them, these voices will take over.

But, if you still yourself and listen carefully, you will hear another voice, a still small voice of calm.

This is the voice of one who knows you and accepts you.

Listen for it. Identify it. You will recognize it.

It will be the one that helps you put those other voices in their place.

It will be the one that stirs your desire to be more like Christ.

It will be the one that will lead you through the day with the promise of peace.

Think of the fruits that Paul attributes to the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are the affections that will move you.

They are the consolations of the still small voice of calm.

They are the feelings that will move you toward the marvelous peace of Christ. Amen.