

The Call to Action in Current Events  
Mark 1:9-15

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*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God . . . .*  
Mk. 1:14

My purpose in this sermon is to propose to you that God uses current events to call people to lives of faithful service and then to encourage you to pay close attention to the news of the day with an eye and ear toward discerning what God is saying to your soul.

*Jesus heard the call to action in current events.*

Jesus spent the first thirty years of his life in relative obscurity in Nazareth. There he grew from infancy to childhood to adulthood. He went from doing a boy's chores to conducting a man's work, perhaps even taking over his father's carpenter's shop after Joseph died. His days were full, but typical and unassuming. His quiet life in Nazareth was gathered around his home, his workbench, and his tools. One day pretty much just followed the next.

But then Jesus learned of the arrest of John the Baptist and everything changed. There was something about John's arrest that summoned him. He suddenly saw that his life could not be lived only in Nazareth in his happy home and going about his good business. Something in the news of John's arrest beckoned him to leave the carpenter's bench and take up life as an itinerant preacher. He would still be about the heavy work of building, but now instead of using hammer and nails and wood he would be building with words and themes and messages. Instead of crafting what people wanted according to specifications they proposed, he would bring them what they needed according to the divine blueprint.

For some reason it was John's arrest that sparked the change. It was John's arrest that moved Jesus to turn his life in a different direction. A current event was the voice of God that summoned him to service.

*Current events spur people into action in our day.*

Joe Biden has reported that news of the racial unrest in Charlottesville in 2017 is what spurred him to run for the office of President of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States Department of Defense reported that interest in joining the American armed forces increased by 8%. Over 180,000 people heard in the events of 9/11 a call to enlist in active service. Another 73,000 joined the reserves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Statement from Joe Biden on the Third Anniversary of Right Wing Protests in Charlottesville," August 12, 2020. [www.joebiden.com](http://www.joebiden.com). Accessed December 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Danielle DeSimone, "Why 9/11 Inspired These Patriots to Join the Military," September 10, 2020. [www.uso.org/stories/2849-why-9-11-inspired-these-patriots-to-join-the-military](http://www.uso.org/stories/2849-why-9-11-inspired-these-patriots-to-join-the-military). Accessed December 24, 2020.

Since the COVID crisis began here in the United States, there has been an increase in the number of inquiries and applications at nursing schools in this country. Men and women are seeing the news play out every day in hospitals and clinics and testing stations across the country, and what they are seeing is summoning them to action.<sup>3</sup>

In Philadelphia, Dr. Ala Stanford, who had been a concierge physician – one who specialized in the care of the rich and famous - saw how COVID was affecting African Americans at an alarming rate in comparison to how it was hitting others. She saw that happening and she was moved to change her focus from concierge medicine – almost pampering the rich – to one of providing high quality health care to minorities.<sup>4</sup>

Whether these people acknowledge it in this way or not, I contend that God is still speaking through current events, calling men and women into active service for the sake of others. Just as the arrest of John moved Jesus to move out of private life in Nazareth and into public life in Galilee, so events today have been like a summons inspiring people to dedicate themselves to some cause greater than themselves.

*We should be listening for the voice of God in current events today.*

Officer James Wells of the Nashville Police Department was one of the officers on the scene Christmas Day when a suicide bomber exploded an RV and significantly damaged several buildings. Officer Wells says that right before the explosion itself he distinctly heard the voice of God telling him to turn around.<sup>5</sup>

Something like that seems for some reason to be rather rare. I am not proposing that any of us must or will hear an audible voice. Be that as it may, I believe we can hear a distinct summons coming from current events as if coming from God. A story may catch your attention. A headline may appear on your news feed. Facts or figures or images of something happening now may grip your heart and your mind. Some current event may be like a magnet pulling you in its direction. The uncanny attraction may be – and may very well be – the voice of God to your soul saying, “What are you going to do about it?”

What might be for us what the arrest of John was for Jesus? Here are some examples, at least as far as the church is concerned.

There are a number of apartment buildings scheduled to be constructed in the near vicinity of our church. They are going to be placed along West Verona Avenue and on Berkeley Avenue and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> This whole end of town is transforming before our eyes and the

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<sup>3</sup> Ilana Kowarski, “How Coronavirus Affects Nursing School Admissions,” *U. S. News and World Reports*, June 18, 2020, [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com). Accessed November 27, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Queen Muse, “How Ala Stanford Became a Champion for the Health of Black Philadelphians Amid COVID,” August 8, 2020. <https://www.phillymag.com/healthcare-news/2020/08/08/ala-stanford-black-doctors-covid-19-consortium/> Accessed December 31, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Dakin Atone, “Nashville police officers describe Christmas morning explosion in their own words,” December 28, 2020, [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). Accessed December 28, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> City of Verona, “Development Projects,” [www.ci.verona.wi.us](http://www.ci.verona.wi.us). Accessed December 24, 2020.

transformation looks to continue. The apartments and other developments will mean an influx of people, all with spiritual needs. I wonder if God is saying to us, “What are you going to do about it?” I wonder if God is saying to Salem through the transformation of this end of town, “Don’t stay in the safety and quiet of the Nazareth you have made for yourself but head into the new Galilee and make a difference.”

Or again – and maybe this is related – a fresh report indicates the most commonly claimed religions identity among young Americans is none. When asked to identify themselves spiritually, a full third and more of young Americans say they are atheists or agnostics or nothing in particular. The report goes on to indicate that fewer and fewer of these “nones” have friends who are people of faith.<sup>7</sup> If it is true that faith is somehow contagious, well, more and more of these non-religious are too socially distanced from anyone who is religious that they are not soon likely to be helped by another’s faith. That was an article in the news just the other day. What are we going to do about it? Is it a summons from God to step away from our accustomed workbench and tools and to take up a different kind of building?

There are still further examples to mention. The headlines are full of the rancor in Washington, DC, a rancor that is spread across the country. We can’t solve it, you and I, but I don’t think God wants us to ignore it, either as individuals or as a church. Every time we shake our heads in disgust over the shenanigans God stands right beside us and says, “What are you going to do about it?”

Racial injustice is another matter making the headlines. The news out of Kenosha is unsettling.<sup>8</sup> It doesn’t portend to get much better any time soon. Is there redeeming value in the racial unrest in that God is using it to bring us out from our Nazareth of private life and into the Galilee of public service?

I do not know which current events in particular God may be using to speak to the church collectively or to individuals more personally. But there seems to be ample evidence – beginning, at least, with John’s arrest triggering Jesus to quit the carpenter’s shop and to become what he was meant to become – there seems to be ample evidence to suggest that God does use current events to call people to serve today for the sake of others.

Sixty years ago a Christian preacher in the American south said, “Life never becomes truly songful till it is tuned and touched by the skilled fingers of a worthy purpose.”<sup>9</sup> Your purpose in life may be embedded somewhere in today’s current events. So let’s be listening for the mighty purpose God has for us to be spoken in the events of the day, just as it was in the days

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Kuruvilla, “The Most Common Religious Identity for Young Americans is ‘None,’ Study Suggests,” Huffington Post, December 22, 2020, [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com). Accessed December 28, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Joe Barrett and Erin Ailworth, “Jacob Blake Shooting: Kenosha Officer Won’t Be Charged,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, January 5, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/no-officers-will-be-charged-in-shooting-of-jacob-blake-11609882148>. Accessed January 6, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Clovis G. Chappell, *Sermons from the Parables* (New York: Abingdon, 1961), p. 62.

of Jesus when John was arrested. That event summoned Jesus to his great work. Some happening around you can call forth your best and lead you to your best.

Scan the headlines. Pay attention to what grips you and tugs at your heart. Then look for practical ways to respond. Therein you can find the work God has meant for you to do, a work that will be a blessing to yourself and to others.