

He was a fisherman. Not born one, even though it was his father's life and breath, and his father's before him. In truth, at a young age he swore he would never be a fisherman; the shock and reality of what fishing truly was—well, he just wasn't prepared. It had caught him off guard. That first time fishing, a small boy with a rod and reel and a hook dangling in the water. And suddenly the line goes taught. His dad, jumping up, shouting instructions about reeling in the line. The rod bending to the point of breaking, the fish flipping, flopping, flailing, fighting with every ounce of strength it had. It had taken the both of them, father and son, to reel it in. And he saw it there on the wooden planks of the deck in a full battle of life and death—tail still flipping, its body floundering; its mouth wide open, the hook still embedded deep in flesh. He watched in horror, the gills extending, the fish writhing and gasping, reaching, extending, for every breath.

"Dad, put it back!" He cried. "The fish doesn't like being caught!" Well, what had he thought really? That he would just sit in the boat and politely call, "Here fishie, fishie." And one by one they would willingly jump into the boat, willingly leave the water, willingly leave behind the only life they had known? His dad only laughed and clapped him on the back. Told him that was fishing. That was life. Disrupting, overturning. Like a fish without water gasping and grasping for life. Well, somewhere along the way he had grown used to it. The delicate balance of life and death. Admittedly, not always delicate. Not always balanced. That the world had a way of sinking its hook into your flesh in a full-on battle of life and death.

Anyway, now he was a fisherman, hook, line, and sinker, even though he no longer lived on the coast, even though now he lived on the prairies, and technically an “inlander.” Fishing was in his blood. The smell of the sea—equal parts salt mixed with the ever-present pungency of salmon and trout with a whole lot of diesel fuel mixed in. The sound of seagulls circling and scavenging; the rocking of the boat in the waves; the knots he could tie with his eyes shut; the balance of storm and calm; predictability in the midst of uncertainty, the struggle of life and death—he was a fisherman. It was his call; who he was to the core.

To say it wasn’t easy to leave it all behind, was no lie. That was for sure. There were many days he felt much more like a fish out of water, flailing and gasping for breath. The uncertainty of this unknown call seemed far riskier to him than the uncertainty and risk of the sea. People said they didn’t understand how he could have left it all behind. They congratulated him for his personal sacrifice. It was his Dad that taught him that life was not about sacrifice or what you left behind, but in the urgency and presence of the very moment you were in. Whatever that moment was. Hook, line, and sinker.

None-the-less, people love to romanticize life, to make it about the danger, to minimize the true call of life deeper into the everyday. We want the stories of high seas adventure. Of the uncertain and dangerous life of a fisherman; of storms and whales, and a life that could swallow you whole. These were the stories these inlanders wanted to hear—of heading out in the wind and waves never quite sure what

the day would hold; if the net would be teeming or empty; if there would be money to pay the bills and put food on the table. Or if the skies would turn suddenly dark; the storms rise and rage. Stories that make for good drama like the ones we see on TV.

It struck him that it was the same with faith. That we want to make it about the adventure, about the personal risk, the sacrifice and what we leave behind—like boats, and nets abandoned in a heap without another thought. “Come and follow me,” Jesus said. And immediately we make it about a bunch of disciples who immediately drop everything and follow at great risk and into unknown peril. Well, fishing isn’t about luck or risk-taking adventure. Faith, and the call to follow, aren’t either. Following Jesus is about the real things. The urgent things. The things of life and death and life-threatening danger you don’t have to go looking for. The things that catch you off guard, and reel you in hook, line and sinker.

“Come, follow me. And immediately they left their nets in a heap on the beach and followed Jesus.” Was following that easy? Like a boy in a boat calling, “Here fishie, fishie.” And immediately and willing they jump right in? Could faith be that simple? Was God’s call to follow truly the romantic notion of risk and sacrifice and leaving it all behind that he had made it out to be? He knew it wasn’t. That he had fought with every ounce of his being to leave behind the things he trusted, the things he had bet his life on; the things he would probably return to in a heartbeat; in a gasping, flailing breath. That God’s call was as disrupting and overturning as being tossed out of a fishing boat and into the sea, as being swallowed whole by a whale,

only to be spit out on the beach of a totally foreign place. That God's call was as disrupting as the life we struggle so hard to hold. Even if that life is not really life at all. Especially when that life is not life at all. That God's call will always meet us in the violent struggle of life and death, where the fishing rod bends to the point of breaking and we can't hold it anymore. We never could.

"Come and follow me." It was God's call on a fisherman turned inlander, a man who left behind the coast, the sea, the nets, the boat, and all he had ever known for the sake of an urgent call, to the prairies and a family bent and breaking. In a battle of life and death. A battle with a world on lock-down. A life disrupted and overturned. Where leaving behind everything they had known was not a heroic option, but thrust upon them. His daughter struggling with anxiety and mental health. His son-in-law out of work. Their mortgage behind. A family struggling with every ounce of strength it had in the place where the structures of our world divide and are laid open and bare. Where the poor, the vulnerable, and the hurting are forgotten and discarded. Like nets in a heap on a beach. While the world goes in search of adventure and pats itself on the back for the sacrifices it has made.

"Come, follow me." And immediately a fisherman came to the prairies. It was unknown territory. To look after his granddaughter. To replace a heap of nets on a beach with a heap of princess dresses and barbies and blocks on a living room floor; where she would teach him the urgency and immediacy of every moment. Where he would learn what his father spoke so long ago, that life was not about sacrifice or what

you left behind, but in the urgency and presence of the very moment you were in.

Whatever that moment was. Hook, line, and sinker.

“Come follow me.” His fingers no longer tying knots, but typing a keyboard, watching online workshops and seminars at night. To support, encourage, bring awareness and acceptance to the reality and struggle of mental health. “Come follow me.” Driving his son to job interviews, and advocating government agencies in active support for the unemployed and the working poor. His primary tools no longer boat, and fishing pole, but an SUV, and a life that would come alongside in the strife and the struggle and raise up hope. To speak hope. To teach his granddaughter how to pray, to tell of God’s kingdom of hope and life that comes to find us, to call us, in Jesus whose life bends to the breaking to raise us up to new life in him. “Come follow me.”

It was not a glamourous call. Not adventurous. Some questioned whether it was a call at all. But it was risky. And is risky. Because the call of Christ always leads deeper into life in the everyday, deeper into the world, where the struggle of life is urgent, immediate. Where the needs of the hungry and the sick, of the oppressed and the poor call into question the exiting order of our lives. Christ’s call will always challenge and disrupt and overturn the existing order of power and authority, of injustice and the darkness of the world. “Come follow me.” The call to fishermen on the beach, the call to all people in the everyday—no matter if in our families, on our streets, with the sick, with our neighbours—it is the call to us, right where we are now, spit out onto the beach of foreign territory; spit out of our churches in the middle of a

pandemic. It is a call to repentance and faith. To turn away from the standards of life we struggle so hard to preserve and maintain, standards we hope we can quickly return to when COVID-19 ends. And while our focus yet turns to everything left behind, the call to repentance, calls us to turn instead to life and hope and healing in Christ. Jesus says it is never about what we are leaving behind, but about the urgency and immediacy of what God is doing right now, right in this present moment.

And that brings us right back to the beginning of Mark's Gospel, and what we miss, the initiating place where the call of Christ begins. That in the very darkness of our world, when John is in prison for disrupting the power of our world; for announcing that the kingdom of God is drawing near—when John is imprisoned by those very powers—along comes Jesus to announce, to proclaim, to be and fulfill the message that no longer does the kingdom of God draw near. The kingdom of God is here. Now, in this moment, this *Kairos* moment. In this moment of God's choosing and God's timing. Jesus comes to the beach, to the world, to us all proclaiming the good news of God, that "The kairos time is fulfilled. God's Kairos time right here. Right now. The kingdom of God has come near. The kingdom of God is here. God's activity is all around us. God is breaking in onto our beaches and our prairies. Breaking into our pandemic of injustice and pain. Breaking into our prisons and all that holds us captive. Breaking in where our lives are bent and broken, into our struggle of life and death. Breaking in, in Jesus who bent over and broken, gasps his last breath, and raises us to new life in him. It is urgent. Immediate. It is God's call. Command. Invitation. Jesus is in hook, line, and sinker. And calls us, "Follow me." Amen.