

# Come With Me

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Mark 3:13-19

Sermons Series:  
In Christ Together  
for the World

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Although there are many exceptions, people in America are growing more isolated and lonely. A recent study reports the number of close confidants in the lives of Americans has shrunk dramatically in the last twenty years. The number of people who have no one to discuss matters important to them has nearly doubled to twenty-five percent. We may have a gazillion Facebook friends, but the circle of close friends for most Americans is shrinking. It's getting easier to grow lonely.<sup>1</sup>

In Acts, chapter 20, the Apostle Paul offers a farewell speech to the elders of the church of Ephesus. He gives them a great deal of advice and tells them he will never see them again. They knelt on the beach and embraced Paul, kissing him, grieving over this goodbye. In fact, the word they "embraced" Paul is the same word Luke used to describe the Father of the Prodigal son falling on his neck and embracing him, hugging him, when the boy came home.

I remember when Wayne Helmer, the best man in our

wedding, finished his Ph.D. at Purdue and was leaving us, he read that story to us at our small-group Bible study. I could scarcely control my emotions, and when the meeting was over, went outside with Wayne and we wept together. I have not seen Wayne face-to-face in thirty-five years, and we could not be closer. We realize, in these days when people easily find themselves feeling lonely and without close friends, that when Jesus says, "I have called you friends," and "love one another, even as I have loved you," he is touching on our deepest longing to be with those friends of the heart whom we love and who love us.

We have been enjoying the immensely powerful story of Jesus, as revealed to us through the Gospel, the Good News, according to Mark, thinking through three questions Pastor Pete has raised to us: Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What is our response? This morning, we look at the third chapter of Mark. Jesus has gathered around him those who are jealous of him and oppose him, and are already plotting how to destroy him. All along, he was

<sup>1</sup> Loneliness-Is-Getting-Rampant-in-America-27518

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calling people to follow him. To Simon and Andrew as they cast a net into the sea, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” And to James and John, who left their father and their fishing nets to follow him. Those invitations were not the invitations to be among his special twelve disciples known as the apostles. He was getting lots of people to follow him. There came a moment when Luke reports that Jesus went up on a mountain and prayed all night. I imagine his prayers were along the line of, “My Father, out of all these crowds of people following me, whom do you want me to focus on?” And Mark reports what happened in Chapter 3, beginning with verse 13:

<sup>13</sup>*He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.*

<sup>14</sup>*And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message,*

<sup>15</sup>*and to have authority to cast out demons.* <sup>16</sup>*So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); <sup>17</sup>James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); <sup>18</sup>and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, <sup>19</sup>and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

So we see this incredibly momentous phrase, “he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him.” To understand its significance, we have to go back into the Old Testament, where we discover that what we might call the preposition “with” is the “holy preposition.” God has always let us know that He is a “with” God. To Moses, *Go, for I will be with you.* Through the prophet Isaiah, *When you pass through the waters [the tough moments] I will be with you.* Psalm 23, *Yea though I walk through the valley of death, you are with me.* Psalm 46, *The Lord of hosts is with us.* We begin to realize that there is nothing you can do to earn God’s love and nothing you can do to lose it. God loves you. Period! It turns out that the words of Julie Gold sung by Bette Midler, “God is watching us from a distance,” are exactly wrong. Our God is nearer to you than your own next breath!

The rhythm and intensity of this holy preposition “with,” builds throughout the Old Testament until we come to the first chapter of Matthew in the New Testament, “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, God is with us (Matthew 1:23). In those days, names meant something. David meant “beloved,” Isaac meant “laughter,” Hannah meant “Favor” or “Grace.” The infant born to Mary could have been named any number of

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things. Call him joy. Call him love. Call him reconciliation. Yet, out of all the possible names, he was named with a preposition—Immanuel. His name is With—God with us—so that we would understand the nature and character and behavior and lifestyle of our God. In answer to the first question, “Who is Jesus?”, we see that Jesus is the with-us God, who is always with us. Although I do remember hearing of a Nun who said she didn’t like to fly in airplanes high in the sky because Jesus had said, “Lo-I am with you!”

So we discover in our text for this morning that when Jesus appointed twelve to be with him, he was acting in accord with who he is – the one who is with. In fact, in all of the stories about Jesus in the Bible, we discover very few times in which he was alone. In Mark 1, we learn he prayed alone. John tells us Nicodemus apparently found Jesus alone and that Jesus was alone at the well in Samaria when a woman approached him. The overwhelming majority of his time was with people, talking to them, healing them, encouraging them, confronting them and loving them. So we see the answer to the second question, “Why did Jesus come?” It is that you and I are invited to experience the wonder of being with the Lord, who loves to be with us. And we have an answer to our third question, “What is our response?” When

you know Jesus says, “Follow me,” then follow him. With his words, “Come to me all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens,” come to him! In response to, “If you hear my voice and open the door [of your life], I will come into you,” open the door of your life to him. The first time I ever heard someone say that Jesus invites us to come to him, follow him, open our lives to him, I knew that there had never been anything I had wanted to do more in my life and there still isn’t. Hear the voice of the Lord who loves you calling you and open your heart to him. He is with you always.

Dick Halverson, former Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, said of his study of the Gospels, “Mark 3:14 became definitive and prescriptive for my ministry. The big word became *with*. Previously I had ministered to or at people. They were objects to fulfill my mission, my agenda. Now they became persons to be with, to be heeded, to be listened to, to hear and to love. People were to be responded to where *they* were, not where I was.”<sup>2</sup> There is such a deep need within us to be with—to be near people we love and to share life at its deepest levels. The concept of “being with” can be a nice theory or an interesting idea, but it means far more than that. It is real relationships. It is

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<sup>2</sup> E. Stanley Ott *The Joy of Discipling*, p. 13.

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being friends of the heart. It is sharing life at such deep levels that if your friend leaves, moves or dies, you weep.<sup>3</sup>

It is this, Mark 3:14, “And Jesus appointed twelve to be with him,” that is the basis of the “with-me principle.” The with-me principle as Jesus modeled it meant that Jesus asked people to be with him on his invitation and on his initiative. There was no one asking him to do it. He just did it. “Come with me, follow me, where I am there you will be also.” When Jesus invited a person to be with him, at least three things happened. They grew as personal friends. “I have called you friends,” said Jesus. They grew as disciples, as learner-followers of Jesus. They became apostles. The word “apostle” means sent one. Jesus sent them out to serve. Now some pivotal words offered by Jesus Christ are captured in Luke 6:40, where we read: “A disciple is not above the teacher but when fully trained will be like the teacher.” It is our destiny, we who love, follow and trust Jesus with our lives to grow in the likeness of Jesus, to be like the teacher. Which means if Jesus invited people to be with him on his initiative, then you and I invite people to be with us in what we are doing on our initiative. And when we invite people to be with us, the same things happen that happened

when Jesus asked people to be with him. We will grow as friends of the heart with them. So we will grow as disciple followers of Jesus with them. We will send one another to serve him.

When I was a graduate student, I managed to get lost looking for a K-Mart and drove up in front of a Covenant Presbyterian Church at 11:00 a.m. one Sunday morning, and I thought to myself, “I guess I’ll go to church.” The pastor, Jim Tozer, preached about sharing our faith and offered to teach anyone who wanted to learn how to do it. I walked up to him: “Dr. Tozer, I would like to join your class.” He said, “My class is already full but I visit patients in the hospital every Monday afternoon. Why don’t you come with me.” His goal wasn’t to teach me to visit sick people, although I did learn that, but in the context of his busy life, it was a way for him to share time with me. Three things happened. We grew as very dear friends. I grew as a disciple. Jim sent me to serve.

So ask yourself, who are the people in your life with whom you would grow in friendship, discipleship and service? What are you doing in your life in which you may use the with-me principle and invite someone to be with you? For example, if you are in a small group that is open to new people, whom do you know that you may say, “come with me” to your small group? I think of many of my

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 19.

***Another way to use the with-me principle is with-me in hospitality as you invite people to come into your life.***

dearest friends around the country and realize at some point or another we were in a small-group Bible study together, and friendship, discipleship and service all came together. If you would like to grow in new friendships of the heart – join a small group here at VPC!

Another “with-me principle opportunity is with members of our families and those who may live with us. When I first learned about the with-me principle, I thought I was to grow in friendship and discipleship with other adults. Then it dawned on me I could use it with my family. For example, there are many errands to run, and I used to do them alone. I’d get home from work and Ann Marie would say, “Stan could you run to the store and pick up some milk?” I’d jump in the car and off I’d go. I started taking the kids with me. Once, going to a grocery, I took our young son, Lee. While I was parking, he turned to me and said, “Dad, do worms yawn?” Later, when I went to Japan to teach, I took Lee as a high school student “with-me” and we experienced incredible things together. On a shopping trip, I invited our five-year-old daughter Shelley to go with-me. It was her first day of school as a kindergartener and I wanted to ask her about her first day of school. “What did you learn honey?” I asked. “I learned about shapes, Dad.” “What kind of shapes?” “I

learned about triangles, squares and reftangles.” “Reftangle? Don’t you mean rectangles, Shelley?” “No, Dad, it’s reftangle. Dad, you need to go to kindergarten.” Special moments happen with people when you practice the with-me principle.

I have loved using the with-me principle with my family. On February 13, there will be a Parents Class in the rooms by the Great Hall, and I will be speaking about a variety of ways to use the with-me principle with our families. You are most welcome and will have a lot of fun using the with-me principle with those you love.

Another way to use the with-me principle is with-me in hospitality as you invite people to come into your life. If that makes you uneasy, then ask a gold friend—Make new friends and keep the old, one is silver, one is gold—ask a gold friend to join you and together ask a silver friend to be with you in hospitality. Ann Marie and I have some dear friends, Dave and Shirley Eads, who learned to practice hospitality when they were just married. Their view was, “our home as it is and our food as it is—just come.” The first time you joined them, they would serve you spaghetti, and the second time you joined them, they served pancakes, and the third time you joined them, you were given your choice.

Essentially, using the with-me principle seeks “with-me

*Jesus is the with-me God, who is closer to you than you are close to your next breath, who loves you with every fiber of his godly being.*

opportunities.” What are you doing in which you may invite someone to be with you—in your home life, work life, social life, church life, all of life? We had a winter storm once that dumped so much snow on our front bushes that they were all crushed. So that spring, Ann Marie ordered twenty bushes from a local nursery. Our son, Lee, was on a high school soccer trip, daughter Lindsay on the same team had hurt her foot and daughter Shelley was too young to help. So I called an acquaintance, Skip Sanders, a silver friendship, whom I didn’t know very well, and said, “Skip, how would you like to be with-me?” We dug around the dirt for three days, and the silver turned to gold and he remains a dear friend. It’s with me in whatever you are doing in which you don’t need to be alone.

If it makes you a little nervous to ask someone, I would say show a little courage! I once taught a class on the with-me principle in Atlanta and realized as I was talking people were smiling at the ideas but several of them had their arms and legs crossed and were leaning away from me. So at lunch I said, “While your facial expressions were positive about the with-me principle, your body language was telling me the exact opposite. So what gives?” One of them said to me, “I am a Myers-Briggs ‘I,’” meaning “I am an Introvert and am uncomfortable asking

people to come with me.” I replied, first you misunderstand Myers-Briggs, which assesses personality types. It does not view an introvert as a person who doesn’t like to be with people but rather as a person who gains energy from being alone. An extrovert gains energy with people. So an introvert goes to a meeting and enjoys the people but leaves tired and an extrovert goes to a meeting tired and leaves exhilarated.

I went on: “When Jesus said, ‘A disciple is not above the teacher but when fully trained will be like the teacher,’ he didn’t mean it for just extroverts or introverts but for all of us who would grow to be like him.” Just this week, I bumped into an old friend in Florida who said, “Stan, I am an introvert and I resisted the with-me principle at first, but I have learned to ask people to be with me.” You can too. And if it just makes you nervous, then use the with-me principle to get a gold friend you are comfortable with and together you may invite silver, those who are newer to you, to join you—and that’s hospitality!

Jesus is the with-me God, who is closer to you than you are close to your next breath, who loves you with every fiber of his godly being. Open yourself to him and enjoy knowing he is with you now and every now—and live as Jesus lives, using the with-me principle with your family, friends, those

***“Come with  
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Ken Medema

with whom you work and those  
with whom you play. As Ken  
Medema once sang, “Come  
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