

## **Designed to Be Free**

*January 25, 2009*

(Epiphany 3 - Year B)

Mark 1: 14-20

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

On the cable TV channel called HGTV, there is this TV show called "Designed to Sell."

The TV show "Designed to Sell" is one of those shows that I see while I am flipping around other channels.

The premise of this show is that some homeowners are putting up their house on the market.

And in order to get their house ready to sell quickly, they bring in an expert team of carpenters and gardeners and decorators to spruce up their house, so that it will be attractive to potential buyers.

The first segment of the show gives us a look at the inside and outside of the house as it currently is.

Then, the experts do a walk through of the house, pointing out all the things in the house that are messed up or in need of repair.

Then, with the help of these experts, and with a budget of only \$2,000, the house is transformed into a showcase.

Yesterday morning, as I procrastinated getting out of our warm bed to step out onto the cold floor, I surfed around TV channels and landed on this TV show called "Designed to Sell."

And on the episode that I saw yesterday morning, the homeowners had way too much furniture and junk sitting around.

Very nice coffee tables were covered with unopened mail and magazines.

Home fitness equipment was unused and served as a rack for drying their clothes.

Furniture was crammed into the living room, making the room look small and uninviting.

The experts all agreed:

The homeowners had to remove some of the furniture and the clutter, in

order to get their house ready to sell.

According to the TV show “Designed to Sell,” you have to get rid of some of your stuff - and create some open space - in order to sell your house.

And, according to the Gospel of Mark, you have to get rid of stuff in your life - and leave your nets behind - in order to follow Jesus.

Because, as Jesus passes along the Sea of Galilee, he sees Simon and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea.

And Jesus says to these two brothers:

“Follow me - and I will make you fishers of people.”

And immediately they leave their nets and follow Jesus.

Simon and Andrew, I bet, lived in houses that were crammed full of nets and rods and reels and a collection of fishing lures.

Because, in order to fish for fish, you need to have a lot of stuff.

However, in order to fish for people, your house needs to be designed to be free and open and inviting.

In the 1940s, the German Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, preached against the Nazi regime in Germany.

Because he was a German voice crying out in the wilderness against Adolf Hitler, Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in the Flossenburg concentration camp.

He was eventually hanged in this concentration camp, just days before the end of World War II.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book that is now a Christian classic, the book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*.

In this book, Bonhoeffer illustrates the cost of following Jesus.

Bonhoeffer is an expert - an expert who shows us how to rearrange our spiritual house and get rid of the clutter of our lives - so that we can be free to follow Jesus.

Bonhoeffer writes:

“The first call which every Christian experiences is the call to abandon

the attachments of this world.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the first step in following Jesus is to abandon the things that we are so attached to.

The first step in following Jesus is to get rid of the furniture and the clutter that cramps our hearts.

We need to leave our fishing nets behind, the nets which entangle us and attach us to this world.

When I was in college at the University of Texas, after every football game, I saved each and every sports section from the Sunday *Austin American-Statesmen* newspaper.

Therefore, I had a complete collection of the local coverage of every Longhorn football game for the four years that I was in college. I bundled the sports sections covering each game into manila folders, one folder for each season.

These manila folders were then labeled and filed by year.

And for years, I saved this collection of football memorabilia, taking it around to wherever we moved to.

A few years ago, while packing boxes to move to Waco, I came across this collection of yellowed newspapers, and I realized that in the last 20 years, I had never gone and looked at the contents in those folders.

After thinking for a moment, I took my collection of newspapers that recorded the 1983 to 1986 seasons of the Texas Longhorns - and I threw them in the trash.

And as I pitched that stack of newspapers, I abandoned just one small, tiny, attachment to this world.

And I felt a strange sense of release - and of freedom.

For Jesus knows that we cannot hang onto our fishing nets and be completely free.

Jesus knows that we have to throw away our fishing nets in order to follow him.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

There is a reason why Christianity has always flourished and been nourished by the monastic tradition.

Nuns and monks, for centuries, have put down their fishing nets and followed Jesus.

Nuns and monks, for centuries, have abandoned their attachments to this world.

They have given up money, they have given up sex, they have given up family.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century way of thinking, the monastic tradition is weird and completely opposite from our beliefs about what brings about American happiness.

Yet, my guess is that monks and nuns - who live a life of prayer and solitude and service - are not that worried right now about home foreclosures or credit card debt or about losing their jobs.

For those who have left their nets are truly free.

Now, Jesus is not asking all of us to sign up for the monastery or the convent.

Yet, Jesus *is* asking us to abandon our attachments to this world.

We need to rearrange our spiritual house and get rid of the things that clutter our lives.

We need to give away our money and our time and our things away.

We need to leave our nets - and follow Jesus.

So, use this Sunday afternoon to go through your closets - and give away those blue jeans that haven't fit you in this century.

Give away your time - by visiting a lonely relative or friend.

Give away your money to God - until it feels like reckless abandon.

Because the first call which every Christian experiences - is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.

For Jesus Christ is the expert who does a walk through of our spiritual house.

Jesus invites us to get rid of the attachments that clutter our hearts.

Jesus invites us to leave our fishing nets - and to follow him.

For you are not designed to sell.  
You are designed to be free.

AMEN.

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