

Manana or Immediately? Mark 1: 14-20

If you travel into the rural parts of our country, eventually you will come across a sign like this. You typically won't see them on Ferrari's or Corvettes, but on Amish buggies, hay wagons and farm machinery. It is a universal symbol that means caution- I am a slow-moving vehicle. We can be tempted to believe that God might have one, especially during those times when we think our prayers aren't being answered fast enough. Not only that, more than 2000 years have passed since Jesus promised to return to earth to gather His church to do battle against Satan and his army of demons. All we can do is find comfort in the words of 2nd Peter 3:8- a day with God is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. God is not slow moving, but patient. All of us should certainly be grateful that He is so patient with impatient people like us.

If you are ever stuck behind one of those orange signs you will quickly find that patience is a virtue that we could use a little bit more of. A famous American president once said this: As Americans, we have many great strengths, but one of our weaknesses is impatience. The Russians think in terms of decades, the Chinese in terms of centuries. Americans think in terms of years, months and even days. But if in the quest for a realistic lasting peace we expect overnight success, instant gratification, we are bound to be disappointed. It is true that we are an impatient people. A lack of patience often results in anxiety, frustration and anger, and there is little doubt that our nation has an abundance of all those things right now. We impatiently pray for the bad things to be over, and over now. And when they linger on, we began to think God has left us or at least forgot about us for a time. It can make us want to give up praying.

Patience is a great virtue, and when it is in short supply, something else will fill the void. Years ago, my grandmother lived in a retirement community in the desert of Arizona. When she would come home to visit, she would tell us the people there had a "manana attitude". Manana is a Hispanic word for tomorrow, but it is sometimes used to imply complacency and apathy. It means "maybe the job will be done tomorrow, maybe the next day, maybe the day after that. Perhaps next week, next month, next year. Who cares?"

There is a big difference between patience and complacency or apathy. Webster's dictionary defines complacency as self-satisfaction, and apathy as "a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern". Complacency is the I'll get around to it when I feel like it attitude. Apathy means I don't care if I ever get around to it. Neither is good for our faith.

The manana attitude is the biggest danger that modern Methodists face in these challenging times. The term "immediately" has gone out of fashion. The UM church has evolved from a speeding car racing to the finish line to a slow-moving vehicle holding up traffic for miles around. It seems we have replaced the cross and flame with the orange sign we see on the front of our bulletins. Some of us are still trying to move quickly, but there are things in the way, both physical and spiritual alike. We are like a Porsche with 2 flat tires. Early Christians expected Jesus to return at any moment and there was a sense of urgency for doing the Lord's work and making disciples. That same urgency resulted in John Wesley, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury forming what was once the fastest growing church in America, the Methodist church. As the years have passed that sense of urgency has diminished. We claim our mission is to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, but too many other things have taken precedence.

Mark uses the word immediately or straightway 36 times in his Gospel account, eight of them in the first chapter. The word "immediately" is found in verse 10,12,20,21,28,31,42 and 18. Look at verses 16-18 with me. Simon and Andrew are both hard at work, casting their nets into the sea to capture fish to be sold in the marketplace to earn their living. They were fishermen. Do you know what is needed to catch fish besides a net or a pole? Patience. If you have ever taken children fishing, you know firsthand that they quickly grow impatient if they don't catch something on the first cast. Without patience, you will yank the bait and hook out of the fish's mouth before it has a chance to swallow it. Certainly Simon, Andrew, James and John had great patience, or they would have gone into another profession.

Or maybe it was just the opposite. Maybe Simon and Andrew had a terrible morning fishing the day they met Jesus. Is it possible that they were in the middle of a dry spell and hadn't caught anything but a few measly carp for the last several weeks? Had they lost their patience and said to each other why even try? There has to be a better way to make a living?

We don't know why, but we do know that they responded quickly to Jesus' invitation. They didn't tell Jesus we'll be there in a few minutes, they didn't say come back tomorrow, they didn't say let us think about it. Verse 18 simply states that they immediately left their nets and followed Him. They dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus. They didn't know what lied ahead. They didn't know that they would eventually lose their lives for His sake. They simply followed Him.

There was no slow-moving vehicle sign on their backs. Jesus led them on an exciting three-year disciple making apprenticeship that would change them and the world forever. Manana was not soon enough for them, as they began their new lives immediately that day in Galilee. Can you imagine having faith like that? The only thing that can stop you is complacency and apathy.

Like the first four disciples, Jesus is calling people just like you and me to be His disciples and make disciples. My prayer is that we will have the faith and courage to begin that task immediately. Our future and the future of our church depends upon it. Amen