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“Then he called them” (Mark 1:20)

Heb 1:1-6; Mark 1:14-20

Last week, as the nation watched in disbelief the chaos in the Capitol, many probably missed the less sensational yet steady, ongoing process of selecting the next administration taking office on January 20. Covered by C-SPAN, cable’s public affairs workhorse, the president-elect has for weeks been introducing his cabinet picks and nominations for key government posts, the team that will implement his agenda as president.

This process offers a much different yet timely parallel to today’s Gospel in which Jesus selects and calls his first four disciples from Capernaum’s fishing community by the Sea of Galilee. He chose two sets of brothers, Simon and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. They immediately left their boats to accompany him. Along with the fact that Jesus saw his ministry from the outset as the work of a community and not a solo performance, his selection of these disciples reveals a great deal about how he envisioned his mission.

These first four were already bound by family ties and partnerships in their trade on the large inland sea. Not only brothers, they were also disciplined collaborators and hard workers, taking their boats out all night to troll the sea with their nets and their skill at finding fish at different depths during seasonal and weather variables. They had risked their lives together during the sudden squalls the lake was famous for and brought their boats and their catch to shore. They had known bounty and

disappointment, coming home full or empty after long hours on the water.

Jesus likely observed them before he chose them. He knew Andrew was already a follower of John the Baptist and trying to convince his brash and contrary brother, Simon, to pay more attention to the growing religious tensions in the air. Jesus witnessed the fiery energy of the Zebedee brothers, known as the “Sons of Thunder.” He saw charisms in their roughness and was ready to form them and the others for the journey ahead.

These first disciples, and a seemingly motley mix of others, including a tax collector, skeptic, zealot and a betrayer, were Jesus’ team. They would expand to more men and women who would give up everything, like the livelihood and future James and John walked away from when they left their father standing on the shore. The stage was set for Jesus’ public ministry, the tumultuous months of miracles and controversy in Galilee, then the long journey south to Judea for a deadly confrontation with the temple authorities, Herod and the Romans.

What follows for us now is liturgical Ordinary Time, but for Jesus and his disciples, here begins a life and death drama to change the direction of history and the fate of the world. Their story became our story with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the launch of his intrepid team. How amazing that they somehow managed to recruit us.

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