

January 28, 2018

A Sermon for the Third Sunday after Epiphany

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GOSPEL

Mark 1:14-20

The holy gospel, according to Saint Mark, the first chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Last week, in the opening of John’s gospel, it seemed very much as though the calling of the disciples was ALL about Jesus...and not so much about the disciples. And, of course, in a way it always is. Today, though, we come to Mark...and what the disciples are doing and how they are answering Jesus’ call is very much a part of the drama that is unfolding.

So, today we can imagine ourselves onto the banks of the Sea of Galilee and see what we might do when Jesus strolls up and invites us to come and follow.

It is interesting to wonder what it means that Jesus comes to the fishermen...

Some scholars will point us to a part of this fishing metaphor that our ears may not hear...but the ears of Ancient Near Eastern Jewish folks would almost

certainly have heard. Fishing is a metaphor used by the prophets...and from Jeremiah and Amos to Ezekiel and Isaiah...fishers are sent out as agents of God's judgment. There is prophetic accountability to live up to the covenant with God hidden in this odd metaphor. God is catching us back up into an identity we are sometimes trying to escape...and work that, like Jonah, we might be running in the other direction to avoid.

This might be part of what Jesus is trying to show us on that ancient seashore.

Of course...it may also be true that Jesus was ready to use the work of whatever everyday person he found to show them how their work would take on new meaning and power...If they had been carpenters...he might have talked about how they weren't going to be shaping and joining wood to create the furniture and tools of everyday life...but rather shaping and joining the lives of people for the kingdom of God.

But the fishing metaphor might be enough, just on its face. Let's sit with what we might already know or understand about fishing...It is striking to me that Simon and Andrew are caught in the act of casting their nets...and that James and John...the sons of Zebedee are mending their when Jesus comes by.

I imagine those nets must have just recently been torn by a large catch...or getting tangled on an obstacle...otherwise they might not have been spending valuable working hours on repairs. Or maybe they knew something Simon and Andrew didn't about when the fish would be biting and were taking advantage of a lull in their quarry's activity to make their repairs.

If the church is called to be about the work of fishing...of casting and mending nets...it makes me think about what parts of our work we are best at. In many places in the church, I think we are so good at preparing our equipment, at learning and thinking about our work. We make beautifully crafted nets.

But sometimes I think we get so busy preparing for our work, we don't get around to doing it. I'm not necessarily picking on Peace...but maybe the church as a whole... It seems to me...I wonder if you have seen this, too...that there are a lot of pristine and beautiful nets hanging in our churches that have never touched water.

There is something between hearing the call and casting the nets that catches

us up. What is it? Are we lazy? Trapped in our perfectionism? Not really interested in helping others? Not interested in sacrifice?

Some of those things might be a little bit true...sometimes...but I think that, more than anything else, we are afraid of failing...We are afraid of what it means if we cast our nets and nothing happens. Because, you see, if we never cast a net...we never have to explain that we couldn't catch a thing...

But here, we can listen again to Jesus' words on the banks of the sea: "I WILL make you...fishers of people," he says. It is a promise – a statement of fact. Jesus says, "I will give you a new purpose. I will make you who you are meant to be."

It can be hard to trust this. But it is true. Jesus walks into our daily lives and says simply, "Come with me. I will change your life. I will renew your purpose in a way you can't imagine. It's as good as done." And lest we worry that Jesus can't mean this about *us*...we can take courage from the fact that the ones Jesus came to that day on the seashore were nobodies, just like we might worry we are. Jesus didn't go to the synagogues...to the ready-made religious students...to the best and brightest. Jesus went to the ones who went to work as soon as they were old enough to help the family to survive...who didn't have the luxury, privilege, or maybe the skills to stay in school. They weren't the wealthy, privileged, or exceptionally intelligent few...They were...well...they were us. Perhaps they

If you have ever wondered if Jesus could possibly be interested in calling you into the inner circle of his friends and followers...know how little the world thought of the ones he did choose. It might be in the very part of your life where you feel least worthwhile that Jesus shows up and says, "I need you... I will make your gifts a means for changing the world...for bringing my plans and purposes to be."

I feel that this calling especially for us in these days. Peace is at a powerful moment in our journey...a moment when we can listen again for where Christ will lead us next. These past few days the congregation council spoke about some of those callings, and we will be discerning them together in the months to come. One such calling is our public claiming of our identity as a community that welcomes and affirms LGBTQ people as made in God's image and precious in God's sight – fully a part of God's purpose for the church and the world. We bless that part of our community's commitment today.

Some will begin the Water from the Well journey for this year at our first gathering tonight...So I invite you also to pray for those deepening their faith through that process.

And I hope we can all go out from this place today with the confidence that Christ is calling to each of us – exactly as we are – to tell us that he is making us a part of the kingdom's work. We are made for a purpose...and we are called into that purpose by the very Word that spoke creation into being.

Let it be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.