

January 21, 2018

(Mark 1: 14 - 20)

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Simon and brother Andrew are fishermen. Jesus says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people".

OK now...at some point in time, we have all heard the preaching...or at least have had the understanding...that this passage means that Jesus, today, calls us to go out into the world to evangelize, to bring those "fish" into the church. That it is God's call to us to haul in those fishing nets and bring the lost, the misguided, the "unbelievers" into our fold.

Right? Tell me you have not heard that sermon at some point. I have. It makes some sense.

Yet, it is the critical nature of Episcopalians to seek the living God among us by using the brains that God blesses us. So, we could...and should speculate with this question: If Jesus was calling them to go out and gather more believers, where and what was the name of his church that would benefit from this? Do we think that Jesus even had an idea of having as nice a place as this building within which to focus his ministry?

Is this gospel message even about gathering? We have the centuries-old image of using big nets, pulled in by husky fishermen, gathering huge numbers of fish. As a result, we might be forgiven the leap of understanding that causes us to get all hung up on the gathering function. But, read this carefully.

Does Jesus use the word "gather"? No. If he is not calling them for what we may have traditionally thought, then what is he doing? "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people". What IS he doing?

On the surface of it, Jesus is seeing these men for the first time. On first impression, you or I might instantly generalize, from their fishy odor and sweaty work clothes, that Simon and Andrew might be simple, hard-working grunts with few "people skills". Sure they know how to fish, but we might not know them to be charismatic. They do not appear as social professionals, or the type to engage excitement in crowds.

Look at that verse again. "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people". "I will make you", he says. Really, I ask you...is not it more like Jesus if, instead, we add just a couple more words to his quotation, and say, "Follow me, and I will make you **want to** fish for people." Doesn't that make more sense to us within our understanding of our lives through the Holy Spirit?

Jesus comes across these two fishermen and deems them to be the right people, in that first century, to go out into the world. He does that by enticing them. Challenging them. But he does it within the language of their lives. Their understanding. Within their comfort zones. And it is all

for the purpose of increasing their confidence in the task ahead. And, what is that task?

It is the same as in the 21st century. The same task that we all have. All of us, baptized into the death and life of Jesus Christ, who have promised to be his disciples as we make our own journeys through this world and on to the next.

That task is to do one thing in life, and one thing only. And that is to engage the world around us to share the news and word that “it is right, and a good, and joyful thing. Always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” We do that by word. By examples of deed. Through relationships with each other, and with total strangers.

We give our lives over to God to be transformed into the very people of God. The very children of God. And then God, by the Holy Spirit through us and in us, influences everyone we come into contact with, and touches everything we do.

The ancient Jews knew this far more keenly than we do, because it was literally hanging as reminders upon their foreheads. Everything about their speech, and literature, and song, and dance, and traditions...all of it, centered upon a cosmic understanding of a more open and direct relationship with God. Although fishermen, Simon and Andrew certainly lived within this more intense spiritual environment. But they did not have the confidence to share their spiritual transformation with others. We are in the same boat...pun intended. Perhaps this is where that old expression comes from! We are in the same boat because we also just do not talk about how God is good to us. Because we often do not recognize how that is, and often do not have the courage to do so.

That is why Jesus used the phrase “fishers of men”...with them. Not for us directly because almost none of us are fishing professionals. It was the enticement THEY needed. Jesus made them curious, but also phrased it in a way that made them comfortable. Fishing they knew. Being called by God to fish?

That was worth checking out because, in hearts touched by God from before birth, Simon and Andrew knew that their hard, physical life was short, and that there had to be more meaning to it. So they run into a simple carpenter with a crowd of people, and what he REALLY says to them, and what he REALLY says to us is this....and I quote

“Follow me, and I will make you...transform you into a person who will have life. You, who will find satisfaction in your life’s journey. You, who will find spiritual peace. You, who will live it, and share it with others. I will transform you so that you will want to do all this.” Unquote.

On this day, we take pause to celebrate...but also to ponder: does your life have more meaning to it? All in the name of the loving God of grace, as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.” Amen.