

The Rev. Joshua Wullenweber
Third Sunday after Epiphany
Mark 1:14-20
Sunday, January 21, 2024

Fishing for me is one of the most peaceful, relaxing, but yet exciting activities I can think of. Driving to your favorite stream, finding the perfect pool, wading into the cold rushing water, picking the perfect fly and then casting back and forth, back and forth, until finally you get a bite... or don't - sometimes that happens as well. For me there is something spiritual about fishing. Nothing to distract. Nothing to worry about. Just time in Gods creation enjoying all that God has made and all that God offers.

This is the image and the feelings that comes to mind when I think about this call to be fishers of people from our gospel lesson today. I think about the joy and peace and excitement that come with taking on this task. What could be better than following Jesus, doing God's work, going out into the world and "catching" disciples for Jesus.

Growing up, this was the literal message I heard from the pulpit. A message that instructed us that as fishers of people we were called to go out and catch disciples for Jesus. To save people and to make sure they knew Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. We were taught there was none more noble or more honorable of work for the Kingdom of God than being disciples in this way.

But would it surprise you though that this simple call story is about much more than a few fisherman setting down their nets and following Jesus. Would you believe that Jesus in his words, and the actions of the first disciples, were about much more than simply joining each other for a walk through the countryside to find more believers and to learn more about God.

No like with many of Jesus' words and calls to action he is asking Simon and Andrew, James and John to radically take a stand for God's kingdom. He is asking them to upset the status quo and to take on a life that was not for any government or political party or temple authority but for service to God alone. Jesus asks the four disciples this morning to leave the life they knew - the life they were bound to - and to walk in faith and follow him for the betterment of God's Kingdom and ultimately the betterment of God's people for generations to come.

See the world in which Simon, Andrew, James, and John worked and lived was not their own. They were subjects to an authoritarian system of law that controlled every aspect of their lives. Their homes were not really their homes. Their income was not really their income. Their profession was not really their profession. As working class people in the first century they were products of an oppressive Roman government who told them where they could live, how much money they could have in their pocket, and who even had complete control over the fish they caught. They were told when they could fish, how much they could fish, and of their bounty, how much went to market and how much was sent across the Roman empire.

So the nets that Jesus called them to put down this morning were not just simple nets. The nets that Jesus called them to leave behind were nets of oppression and persecution and domination by an evil earthly power. Jesus called his disciple then and his disciples now to stand against

such powers that work to belittle, undermine, and repress God and God's people in this world. By putting down their nets they were taking a stand not for Cesar or Herod but they were taking a stand for God's kingdom. A kingdom that values all people. A kingdom that seeks peace and harmony. A kingdom that is built on grace, forgiveness, and love.

Now unfortunately the oppressive nets of this world still run long and deep. We do not have to look very far to see those ensnared by the many injustices of this world. The staggering rates of homelessness, hunger, and job insecurities. The brutal wars that are causing loss of life for countless innocent souls. The hateful actions and words against our siblings of different orientations, races, and religions. Christ's call to put down our collective nets is still very much relevant here today.

So how can we be change seekers and way makers for those who are caught in the nets of the injustices of this world? How can we help those nets to be pulled down once and for all? How can we be true fishers of people and continue to build the Kingdom of God here in this place?

Today we are reminded and called to put down those nets of outside influence that do not prescribe to the values of love, grace, peace, and forgiveness – the values God wishes for all God's people. We are called to evaluate whether the systems we belong to or that influence our lives – we are called to discern if those systems are life giving or life hindering – and not just for us but for all God's people. After all the whole purpose of a net is capture and subdue – so we need to ask ourselves what nets are we caught in, what nets is our community and world caught in – and how do we help to leave those nets behind so no one has to experience another day of restraint or oppression – separated from the fullness God and God's love that is meant for all people.

The good news this morning that Jesus shares is that through God, there is always opportunity to start a new – through God the act of repentance and reconciliation is always possible. Christ tells his disciples in the opening verses this morning that through him this world and God's people always have the opportunity for a fresh start – to take that u-turn – that about face – that 180 - whatever terminology works best for you. We as God's people always have the option to help put down the nets of this world. Now can we end wars and famine and drought – not in one day... but collectively we can work to radically welcome the stranger, to feed the hungry, to take care of the sick and dying among us.

So who in our community needs to be seen. What relationships need to be mended. When is the right time to stop and help that person we've passed so many times on the street. How can we ensure that Redeemer is not just the church on the corner but the Church of Jesus Christ that is fully living into and building God's kingdom in both word and deed.

God has given us the perfect example of what this looks like in Christ Jesus our Lord. God has sent with us an advocate and companion in the Holy Spirit to help and guide us on our way. We just have to be willing to put down those nets and follow him.

Amen.