

Text: Mark 1:14-20
Theme: "Relationships"
#941

Jim Gronbeck
Epiphany 3B
January 21, 2018

I went into my first parish pretty green around the ears, if you know what I mean. I didn't have much experience and the learning curve at a two-point parish is pretty steep sometimes!

It wasn't long before a retired man in the parish started visiting with me and invited me out to go fishing. Pete had retired because of a few heart attacks. He and Siiri, his wife, had a cozy home they had built on a lake near Cromwell. We fished quite a bit that summer, getting to know each other, and Pete teaching me a lot about fishing. Then, as fall approached, Pete invited me to go deer hunting with him and his extended family. Over the next 7 years we spent there, Julie, the kids and I spent a lot of time with Pete and Siiri (which is a Finnish name—lots of Finns there!) We had a lot of fun together.

Pete had a simple Lund boat with a 6 hp Johnson motor, but we caught a lot of fish together. We also ice fished – but without a house. We just sat on pails on the lake. Pete fished so much that his face actually got tan from the reflection of the sun. He would call me up and say, "Hey Pastor! Do you want some fish?" Of course I never turned him down! He would then say "Come on over tonight at we'll give you a mess of fish!"

When I'd get there, the crappies and or walleyes were still in the pail! So we cleaned fish for a couple hours. I learned how to fillet fish from Pete, but I could never clean them as fast as he could!

I realized that the important thing in the time I spent with Pete fishing or hunting was the relationship we built. We had a lot of time to talk and I learned a lot about faith and life from Pete. His big, over-worked heart gave out a few years after we moved here, but I still think about him whenever I clean fish.

In Mark's Gospel today, we hear Mark's story of the call of the disciples. Here we learned of the beginning of Jesus' relationship with His disciples. Jesus was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in a beautiful, lush area of Northern Israel. These future disciples were fishermen. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fished the Sea of Galilee, as well as James and John, who were fishermen with their father Zebedee.

For the people in Jesus' time in Galilee, fishing was more than a past time. It was their livelihood. Fish was a staple part of the diet of the Galileans judging from the numerous examples and stories about fish and fishing in the Bible. These commercial fishermen usually knew where to find the fish and were accustomed to hauling in large quantities of fish.

Like the call of Nathanael and Philip in last week's gospel, these fellows immediately dropped their fishing business and followed Jesus. For them to drop their livelihood and follow Jesus so abruptly is intriguing. They knew how to catch fish, but for them to hear Jesus tell them that from now on they would fishing for people must have been perplexing. What does Jesus mean when He says, "I will make you fish for people?"

The beginning of Jesus' ministry involved calling His disciples together to learn from Him. The rest of the entire Gospel involves the disciples ***learning how*** to fish for people. Sometimes they caught on to what He was teaching; other times they didn't have a clue! I'm sure they felt like 'fish out of water' as they followed Jesus from place to place. Jesus was asking them to exchange an old way of life for a new way of life. He was saying, "For years now, you've worked to gather fish from the sea, now I am calling you to gather people—not into nets, but into the family of God." Jesus is calling us to create relationships that help bring people to faith in Him.

Today we are welcoming ten new members into the Christian fellowship of Zion. We are asking you to join with us as we work to minister in Jesus' Name here in this place. We are anxious to learn from you, and

to share the Good News of Jesus together. Our hope and prayer is that we will be a blessing to one another as we go about Jesus' work.

The theme that is evolving from this service seems to be one of relationships. The most important thing in my activities with my friend Pete was the relationship that we formed. We were good friends who were able to talk openly and honestly with one another. We shared our faith stories together and just spent a lot of time with each other which developed into a strong friendship.

As we think about Jesus' call of His disciples and the intense time they spent together, we learn about the relationships they shared. Many times they were befuddled, lost, or mistaken in their thoughts about the ministry they had with Jesus. There were also many important times of learning, of seeing miracles firsthand, of seeing Jesus confront the power people of His day and share with them God's Word and the Promise of a New Life.

Today in the reception of new members we shared in the Apostles' Creed as the profession of our common faith. We join together to be followers of Jesus Christ—'fishers of people'—who join together to share the faith and bring others to salvation in Christ. Jesus was calling His disciples to a specific action on God's behalf. Jesus wasn't like an old

philosopher calling his disciples to sit at his feet and learn, they were called to action—to get out there and live out our congregation’s mission statement: “We are claimed, gathered, and sent forth to serve and witness in Jesus’ name.” This mission statement is about relationships with Jesus and with our neighbors on this planet.

There’s an old story about Jesus returning to heaven and talking with Gabriel about His time on earth. Gabriel noticed the signs of the crucifixion which Jesus still carried, and he cried out, “Master, you have suffered so terribly! Do the people know and appreciate how much you love them?”

Jesus replied, “Oh, no, not yet. Right now only a few people in Palestine know.”

Gabriel was surprised. “Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love?” he asked.

Jesus said, “I have asked Peter, Andrew, James and John, and a few more friends to tell others about me. Shortly they will receive the Holy Spirit to lead them on this adventure. Those who are told will tell others, and so on, until the farthest corners of the earth will know how I gave my life for them.”

Gabriel frowned. “Yes, but what if Peter and the others grow weary? What if the people after them forget? Surely you have made other plans?”

Jesus answered, “No Gabriel, I haven’t made any other plans. I’m counting on them.”

Our Lord is counting on us. He has given us the Holy Spirit as our guide and advocate with God. In this day and age, with the deep need in our world for the Savior and His love, we are called to be ambassadors for Christ as we develop these relationship with others. We are called to ‘be a blessing to one another’ and to love others following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN