



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

January 25, 2026; Epiphany 3A: [Isaiah 9:1-4](#), [1 Corinthians 1:10-18](#), [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

“As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.” In order to understand this story – and the famous words “I will make you fishers of men” – we need to ask a basic question. Who were Simon and Andrew fishing for? To put it more clearly, who were they catching the fish for? We have an image in our heads that Simon and Andrew were Galilean version Baymen and Bonackers, going out every day to fish for their families and for sale at local markets. However sentimental this may sound, it doesn’t match reality. As demonstrated by amphora recovered from ancient shipwrecks, Galilean fish paste (known as “allec”) was a highly prized condiment throughout the Roman world, used in everything from everyday meals to elite banquets.[1] Like pork, fish was a staple of the Roman soldiers. While most people are familiar with Jewish dietary laws and quickly understand that the herds of pigs on the shore of the sea of Galilee were being raised to feed the Roman army, they miss the point that Galilean fish were being caught for the same purpose. If you watched Ken Burn’s series on the American Revolution, you understand the importance of supply lines and know that an army marches on its stomach. My point is that the Galilean fishermen weren’t working for themselves. They were part of a vast Roman military industrial complex. They were making money, but they were doing so by collaborating with the enemy, by aiding and abetting –and feeding – their oppressors. They might have been blue collar working kind of guys, but they weren’t naïve. They knew the prophecies of Isaiah. They knew that God had promised to redeem Israel. They had heard that John the Baptist and Jesus were starting to put these prophecies in practice. With this context, it is no wonder that when Jesus called them, the fishermen immediately dropped their nets. Given this context, it becomes clear that in asking them to become fishers of people, Jesus wasn’t talking about building the church, he was talking about building a movement, a revolutionary movement, and a movement of resistance and hope. In asking the disciples to fish for people, he is talking about recruiting people to be part of a kingdom that would last more than 2000 years after the empire in front of them was gone. Given this context, it’s no wonder how quickly the disciples dropped what they were doing. Given our context, it’s no wonder that thousands upon thousands of people - including hundreds of clergy - did the same thing this week in Minneapolis and Portland, Maine. Yesterday, yet another person was shot. Though official versions again try to hide the truth, people who were there could see what happened. They know that Alex Petti, like Renee Cole Good, was murdered. They made the connection with Jesus and they made the connection with Jesus’ call to welcome the stranger, love their neighbor, and stand up for the poor and oppressed. Yesterday afternoon, I talked to a cousin who lives in Minneapolis who spent her free time this week delivering groceries to immigrants who are afraid to leave their homes.

Yesterday evening, I saw a video clip of a friend - a high school principal in Lewiston, Maine - who is making an effort to do the same for Somali families whose kids attend his school. People from Maine and Minnesota are not deterred by a little bit of snow... or ice. Given their context, it's no wonder that they dropped their nets and took on the work of Jesus. Given our context, it is time for us to do the same.

In more normal times, this text is used to talk about evangelism and bringing more people into the pews. These days, every congregation seems to wish that it had more young people and young adults. Well, the number one source of anxiety and fear among many young adults is climate change. The church has many theological and scriptural resources to tackle this issue – but even as the biggest iceberg in the world is breaking up, our biggest action is putting in LED light bulbs and not using Styrofoam cups. Young people are concerned about the costs of higher education, health care, and housing. The church has many theological and scriptural resources to tackle these issues – but our biggest goal is balancing our own budget and meeting our stewardship goals, with our people putting faith not in spiritual growth but in the growth of tech stocks and the S&P500. Young people want to lead but when they look, everyone in church leadership seems to be their parents' or grandparents' age. Young people are struggling with loneliness, depression, and pressures from the digital world. They long for community and for someone to tell them they are valued and loved. They dream of a world where they are judged by the content of their character and not by their race, gender, or identity. We have great theological and scriptural resources to respond to all of these things, yet young adults find in a world where racial profiling, misogyny and hate speech are ubiquitous, justice is corrupted, and leaders behave with no character at all, where many Christians not only give those folks a pass, but actually support their agendas. Being fishers of men and women isn't about getting people to build up or care for the church. It isn't about entertainment or the right kind of music or the latest technology. It's about living with integrity, matching our actions with our values, and connecting with the holy that is in us. It's about giving people a meaning and purpose in their lives that is bigger than themselves. It's helping they experience communion and community and participate in the worship and mission of God. It's about inviting them to be part of a movement, a Jesus movement, in which their lives are changed, the world is transformed, prophecies are fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is revealed and love and justice lived in real and vital ways. If we don't do these things, there are other churches that will – including those who preach a Christian Nationalism that isn't Christian at all.

So what do we do? The interesting thing about the fishermen is that Jesus asked them to continue to fish, only to fish in a new way, to fish in a way that fulfilled prophecy, and fish in a way that fulfilled their faith. In other words, Jesus asked the disciples to use what they were good at in a disciple kind of way. So, what are you good at already? What are your gifts and skills? What hobbies and activities give you life? Jesus is asking you to keep doing those things... only to do them with new meaning and purpose. He is not asking you to change what you are doing. He is asking you to change who and what you are doing it for. Today's scriptures are asking us to become part of the Jesus movement, to respond to the needs of this world, stand up for justice and peace, and build up the kingdom of God. At Christmas people often say that Jesus is the reason for the season. Epiphany tells us that Jesus can also be the reason for how we live our lives. Come follow me and I will make you fish for people. It is an amazing, radical, and even revolutionary request to put your faith in action. It is an opportunity to make a difference with your life and in the world in which you live.

[1] https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/59429CB331C63A70ADDB240D42869A8F/S146195712200050Xa.pdf/first_evidence_of_trade_in_galilean_salting_fish_on_the_carmel_coast_in_the_early_islamic_period.pdf