

Title: Teach One to Fish

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you sent many to bring the world to you culminating with your son, who in turn called others to this task and then delegated the Holy Spirit to call us; may we, reflecting your love, help bring the world to your kingdom, through Christ Jesus through whom we pray. Amen.

Gary Nicolosi recently read an article about some pelicans in California. If you've ever seen pelicans in action, you know they're great ... fisher-birds, I guess. These pelicans were hanging out near a fleet of fishing boats. The fishermen (sic) on the boats would pull into the little harbor, and clean the fish right on the spot, throwing the heads and the rest into the water. The pelicans picked up on this, and began eating the leftovers without having to go out fishing. And if you're a pelican, that's good eating. So for weeks, they just sat by the harbor and waited for the fishing boats to come in.

After a while, the fishermen found out they could sell the fish waste, and so they stopped chucking it into the water. The pelicans were caught unprepared. They continued to sit and wait for the fishing boats to come in and throw free food in the water. And they grew thinner and thinner and seemed able to do nothing about their situation.

Wildlife officials came to check out what was going on, and concluded that the pelicans had forgotten how to fish. So, what they did was to bring pelicans in from another area to join the flock and teach the starving birds how to fish again.

This is akin to what happened in Judea. The Jews forgot that God called them to be a light to the world. They looked inward. Rather than bring in some other Jews or pelicans to teach the Jews how to be the light to the world, God sent Jesus to be the light of the world. Jesus needed some Jews to help him with this mission. So, Jesus began with people who knew how to fish. These Jews who knew fishing were taught by Jesus to fish for people.

[Last week, we heard John's version of the calling of Andrew and Peter. This week, we hear Mark's version that is used by Matthew and Luke.]

In John, Jesus' first followers were John the Baptist's followers and were in Judea. John's gospel has Jesus hanging around after his baptism while Mark and the others have Jesus go on a spiritual retreat in the wilderness. After Jesus's time in the wilderness, he goes to Galilee.

Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Jesus spends a lengthy time alone and was tempted. After serious self-examination, Jesus is ready to begin his ministry.

Jesus chooses Galilee to begin his ministry. There may be several reasons for this. The first and most logical is that Jesus knows the territory. Nazareth is 19 miles from the lake, about a day's walk. Jesus knows where things and people are. Perhaps more importantly, Jesus knows the people. Jesus knows where they are spiritually. Jesus knows what they think about Rome and Jerusalem.

Another advantage is that Jesus is as far from Jerusalem as anyone can be and still be in a predominately Jewish area. Interference from the religious authorities would be minimal.

Jesus begins his ministry after John the Baptist is arrested by Herod Antipas. Jesus' initial message to the people of Galilee is the same as John the Baptist's: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15)

There is a sense that Jesus begins by continuing John's ministry after John's arrest. John's voice will not be silenced. Herod Antipas was also ruler of Galilee, yet Jesus does not seem to fear him.

Jesus begins by continuing the popular ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus introduces himself to Galilee with a message that the people, at the time, were very open to hear. The message is one of salvation from a foreign occupying army.

Jesus' message implies a messiah led revolution is at hand and there are conditions for this revolution. The first is that people repent their sins. Jesus does not mention a baptism like John's. The second is that they believe the good news. Mark does not explain what that is, but it may be implied from Jesus' teachings later in the gospel.

Jesus realizes that he cannot accomplish what needs to be done by himself. Jesus must already know that his ministry will be short and he needs disciples to take over after he is dead. I say this because the disciples do little until after the resurrection. What they do at this time is a three-year training session. In fact, they don't even get the punch line until after the resurrection.

Now that Jesus has established himself as a spiritual force, it is time to recruit. The first two that Jesus seeks are two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They were fishermen. They were at work when Jesus encounters them. They seem be close to shore, because Jesus is able to talk to them. If they were fishing from shore, they were too poor to afford a boat.

Jesus implores them to follow him and instead of catching fish, they will fish for people. Mark says they *immediately* left their nets to follow Jesus. How many of us would instantly quit our jobs to follow an itinerate preacher? I don't think I would. Or at the least, not without some discussion or internal debate on the benefits and risks.

Jesus didn't lay out what they would do or what to expect by following Jesus. There was no job description. With no concern about their future, they dropped their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus must have been an extremely charismatic figure.

A short distance along the shore the three encounter two more fishermen, James and John. They were also brothers, sons of a man named Zebedee. They were at the shore mending their nets.

Jesus calls James and John and *immediately* they followed Jesus. In this case, they left their father's boat and the hired men. These brothers were part of a wealthy family who can afford a boat and pay workers. Jesus does not discriminate based on someone's net worth. Rich fishers and poor fishers are invited to ministry.

We are not told if Zebedee shook his fist at them as they walked away and Zebedee saying unkind things to them. Or, Zebedee might have been supportive. Or, Zebedee thought his workers were more competent at fishing than James and John and he was glad to be rid of them. In any case, the

future of Zebedee's business was walking away from him. That must not have been a good feeling.

I think Mark's point was that these people were willing to walk away from all they knew and walk away from their families. This was very difficult. Typical of Mark, Mark does not dwell on details. Mark leaves more questions than answers to his stories. Mark is focused on Jesus.

Mark's purpose might be to demonstrate to a reader of his gospel that the reader should seriously consider following Jesus even though Jesus is gone. Simon, Andrew, James, and John do not yet know all the things Jesus teaches nor were they aware that Jesus could perform miracles. They were leaving the lives they knew for a promise or expectation that the world is on the cusp of a radical change.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John give us an example of what a response of repentance and faith look like. Andrew's name is the only non-Semitic name among the four. It is Greek. We are reminded that the gospel will eventually branch out beyond Judea and Galilee to the rest of the world. Jesus called these four into a new way of being.

The disciples will later find out that for whatever reason they signed up to follow Jesus, whether that was a political or a military or a spiritual revolution, what was coming was a message of love. Jesus is love personified. Maybe that is why he was so charismatic. What better reason to quit our lives than to follow love? In a world of hate and animosity, love is a radical change.

Text: **Mark 1:14–20** (NRSV)

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

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother

ⁱ Or *gospel*#

^j Other ancient authorities read *of the kingdom*

^k Or *is at hand*

^l Or *gospel*

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John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Mk 1:14–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.