

Jesse Perkins  
Friday, January 24, 2020  
Year A Epiphany 3  
Annual meeting sermon

Isaiah 9:1-4  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

## “Leaving the nets behind”

- I think we have discussed this before, but I am not much of a fisherman
  - My dad is a good fisherman, my brother was a good fisherman
  - I just remember being hot, bored, and not wanting to push that worm on the hook because it was gross
  - And I also remember casting my line and having the special gift of finding every underwater hazard that was there
  - And getting my hook stuck in it.
  - Or even above water hazards like trees, or people.
    - Hooking people is not fun, that’s not what Jesus meant by fishing for people.
  - But none of these experiences in my life really tell us much about the scene here in the gospel
  - Where we find Jesus meeting and calling his first disciples to come and follow him
  - And they would leave their nets and follow
- In this morning’s gospel, it is Matthew who recounts the call story of Andrew, Peter, James, and John
  - All fishermen, all called by Jesus while practicing their trade
  - Now if you’re really paying attention to the readings from week to week, you might notice that we heard about this last week too<sup>1</sup>
  - Only it was from John’s Gospel last week, when Jesus calls Peter
  - In John’s gospel, Andrew left John the Baptist and followed Jesus, and then later told his brother Simon about him
  - Simon later comes to Jesus at his brother’s prompting, and that’s when Jesus gave Simon his new name, Peter.
  - Today from Matthew, Jesus instead finds them both fishing, and they leave their nets and follow him when he calls to them
  - They leave together without saying a word

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany3a>, Podcast retrieved online 1-24-2020

- It's a similar story in Mark, where we think Matthew got much of his material
- In Luke, there is yet another account of Jesus telling them to cast their nets in deeper water, and they get a miraculous catch of fish
- The that almost breaks their nets, after which they decide to follow him
- 4 gospels, three distinct accounts of the call story of the first disciples.
- I like to take these opportunities when they present themselves to encounter scripture as it really is
- We have four gospels, four different perspectives and perhaps oral traditions at work
- And today we have three distinct retellings of how the first disciples came to believe, trust, and follow this man named Jesus
- It is one of the gifts of our scripture, I believe, that we get these different accounts, for they each add depth and dimension from their own perspective
- Instead of an objective, third-party historical account of what happened, which BTW was never the Bible's goal
- Instead, we get insight into why it mattered to these authors and their communities.
- We get big T truths, and from four different angles
- Matthew, we suspect, writes to a group of converted Jews, and is very interested in how Jesus' life fulfills the Hebrew Scripture and prophecy
- Take for instance the care he gives us to center us in Capernaum, in Zebulun and Naphtali <sup>2</sup>
- These areas were once conquered by Assyria, and the prophet Isaiah promised of old that they would get to see a great light
- And through the life of Jesus, they do.
- In addition, I believe among his list of truths, Matthew wants us to know just how much faith these men had from the beginning, and now much it cost them
  - Take for instance, their occupation
  - In contrast to my feelings about fishing, these men depended upon it for their livelihood
  - I imagine they cared very much about how many fish they caught
  - We find them today at their regular life- doing what they did almost every day

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany3a>, Podcast retrieved online 1-24-2020

- Jesus walks by, says follow me, and off they go
- They followed immediately, Scripture says, leaving boats, nets, and parents where they were
- This could not have been a small decision
- For these four gentlemen, questions of their very survival where certainly going through their minds
- What would we eat, how would we live?
- And what about their aging parents? Who would care for them.
- Perhaps they even had families: children, wives- all dependent upon the success of their fishing trips
- They left behind everything that the world says was important to do
- I believe Matthew wants to tell us something else about Jesus and his disciples- they were not all the same
  - The first two, Peter and Andrew, were most likely lower class, only casting a net into the sea. <sup>3</sup>
  - Compare this to James and John, sons of Zebedee: they had a boat and nets.
  - Mark's gospel even tells us that they had hired workers (Mark 1:20)- this was perhaps a family business
  - Yet Jesus calls all kinds of people from various stations of life
  - And all four men simply leave with Jesus without saying a word.
  - Each bringing a different perspective, different abilities and experiences of the world
  - But each convinced that Jesus was something special
- And finally, another piece to Matthew's account of this calling was that it was a very different type of teacher-disciple relationship<sup>4</sup>
  - Normally, students would seek out their teachers and ask the teacher's permission to follow and study with them
  - In this case, however, Jesus breaks tradition and calls out to four people specifically
  - He saw them, and he called to them
  - And they follow.
  - What would convince these four men to follow Jesus at the cost of their careers and financial security?

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion, quoted by Kate Huey, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/january-27-2011-i-third.html>,

<sup>4</sup> Matthew, New Interpreters' Bible Commentary, CDROM

- Maybe Jesus was very charismatic, and he had a great voice and a face you could trust.
- Maybe Jesus offered them hope beyond their regular life
- The Gospel says that Jesus told them he would make them fish for people.
- I believe Matthew has brought us right to this point intentionally
- Asking, what was it about Jesus that caused these disciples to do the unthinkable, the irrational
- What kind of teacher is Jesus, calling disciples by name,
- Saying they would be fishing for people
- What was it that caused them to leave their nets?
- For most of the sermons I have heard and even preached on this text
  - The focus is on the fishing- you can see why
  - Jesus tells them perhaps to stop fishing to simply catch fish, and instead start trying to catch people
  - To bring people into God's Kingdom and into this ministry Jesus is beginning.
  - Fish for people and catch them, and bring them to God's salvation
  - Or another way to hear it, and I found this a fascinated take on hearing this phrase differently.
  - Maybe Jesus is suggesting a different reason to fish...
  - To stop fishing for the sake of the fish, and start doing it for the sake of people... fish FOR people
  - Or whatever it is that one does for a living, whether it's fishing, or a tax collector, a teacher, a carpenter... whatever you do, do it for people<sup>5</sup>
  - With a love for people, for God's children, at a higher importance than what you do and what you earn from it
  - Jesus said he will make us Fish.. for people
- But what I am most interested in this morning is what they left behind in order to do that.
  - They left the nets behind.
  - These were the tools of their trade- they washed them, mended them, untangled them
    - kept them in good working order so they did not fail when they needed them most.
  - These tools that were designed to catch fish and hold them there

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany3a>, Podcast retrieved online 1-24-2020

- Maybe they were even safe- safety nets- safe and comfortable
- I wonder if these new, soon-to-be disciples were not also caught in the nets...
- Caught in what they had always done, what they had been told was important and the right thing to do
- Caught in an endless cycle of just casting the nets and catching some more fish
- And Jesus' call to them was like a light shining in the dark, it was a chance to do more,
- It was spiritual freedom from everything in the past that had held them back.
- Jesus was calling them to be a part of this new thing, this new Kingdom that had come near
- This Kingdom of God that was breaking in and was going to begin the transformation of the world- one that still is ongoing today.
- We started a new year recently, and today we have our annual parish meeting to look back over the past year
  - And look forward to a new one together in this place
- Are there nets that hold you back?
- Nets that hold us back from living into God's call this year, and keep us from inviting and calling others to join us?
- Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people"
- "And they left their nets and followed him. "

Amen.