

Pastor Jon's Sermon from January 25/26

Text: Matthew 4:12-2 - the calling of the fishermen

“What are your nets?”

Jesus calling the fishermen has always captured my imagination as I considered becoming a pastor. I love fishing, and the fact that Jesus called fishermen to be his first disciples got me thinking of how I can follow him too. What would cause these people to drop everything to follow Jesus?

In our Gospel for today, Jesus is in transition. He was baptized and spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. Jesus' friend, John the Baptist was just arrested. Jesus, according to Matthew, withdrew from his home town of Nazareth to the Galilee Region to begin his public ministry. The idea of withdrawing in the original Greek is to get away from something... to escape. Jesus left his family and friends behind. He picks up on John's message of “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” In essence, Jesus is starting life anew and picking up where John left off.

I can relate to all these transitions, moving, leaving family behind, starting a new job, picking up where others have left off. I am sure you can relate to transitions in your life as well. Your bodies don't work like they once did. You may have had to say goodbye to homes, jobs, and neighbors. Perhaps you retired recently. Maybe you are going to college soon. Maybe you are getting married or starting a family. We understand transitions, and we know they aren't easy.

But in the midst of these changes, Matthew preaches a word of hope to the church by quoting Isaiah 9. “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. On them light has shined.” Light is coming into the world, and this light is Jesus. A new dawn is on the horizon. Jesus' ministry will bring hope and healing in the midst of darkness. Most scholars believe the darkness Matthew is countering is the Roman Empire's domination. Times were tough for the Jewish people living under Roman occupation.

So how does Jesus begin his new ministry? He calls others to work with him. He realized he can't do it alone. He will need someone to carry on his ministry after he goes to the cross. He is a recruiter. Our God is a missionary God.

Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee and saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the sea. They were in the middle of work when Jesus called them. Jesus thought, I can use their gifts to bring forth the Kingdom of Heaven. "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Immediately they left their nets.

Immediately.

That means right now. How many of you would up and quit your job to follow Jesus immediately.

Why were they so willing to leave their nets behind so quickly?

What was it that made following Jesus so appealing? Did they know of Jesus and his mission already? They didn't know if they would be paid or even eat. What about their wives and kids? I know Peter had a wife, because Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law.

This tells me there was more to the story. Fishing was not only hard work, but because of the harsh conditions and taxes Rome placed the fish they caught, it was hard to make a living. Many of these fisherman were in debt because of Rome's appetite for extravagance. It might have been like paying off the Mafia. Can you tell I have been slogging through *The Irishman*?

Then Jesus walks a little further and finds James and John, the Zebedee brothers mending their nets. This was tedious work... mending nets. Jesus called them and they too left immediately. Not only did they leave their boat, they left their father behind and to follow Jesus.

As a father, I would have been hurt. I would have been angry at Jesus for taking my sons away. Father Zebedee's ability to make a living was now compromised. But Jesus offered hope to these young men.

Another point I want to make is Jesus called ordinary fishermen as his disciples. These were not the most highly educated people. At age 12, if you weren't smart enough to go onto school, you would go home to work the family business.

The grace I see here is Jesus chooses the B team as his first disciples. I love this, because I was on the B team in 9th grade basketball. I feel like Jesus has called me too despite my flaws.

Whatever skills these fishermen had, Jesus saw as valuable in bringing his message of the Kingdom of Heaven to others. They had work ethic, they knew disappointment when the fishing was slow, they knew the harshness of life in the first century, they longed for someone to place their hope in. Jesus was it.

The message for us today is Jesus still employs us to fish for people. Not by deception, but using the gifts God gave us to invite others in. These disciples had a lot of OJT... on the job training. And they messed up many times. But Jesus still had grace and love for them daily.

Jesus has grace for us too. We are also called to fish for people. Our means of fishing is the love of Christ. Grace. Reconciliation. Healing. Our words and deeds can draw others into the faith. What are your nets? What are you clinging to that keeps you from fully following Jesus?

Whether you know it or not, every day we are fishing for people by our words and deeds. Happy fishing!