

## SERMON TEXT FOR EPIPHANY 3B

PREACHED JANUARY 21, 2018 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Mark 1.16-20; Jonah 3.1-5, 10; Psalm 62.1-12; 1 Cor 7.29-31

One of the hallmarks of the gospel of Mark – which was the first written account of Jesus – is the swiftness with which the action takes place. This sense of urgency, of immediacy in Mark's Gospel is emphasized from the very opening line in the simple message that Jesus delivers, *"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news."*

Jesus does not spend a lot of time analyzing the big picture. His mission, his purpose is not very detailed. He is quite intent on telling us from the very beginning God's picture of the world: God is near, God's power is at work. Hear this good news and follow me.

And so today we read in Mark the story of how the first four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, are called by Jesus to be disciples. While it takes three chapters in our Old Testament lesson for Jonah to say yes to God and to get to Nineveh to share God's message, in a remarkable four verses these fishermen leave their nets, their security, and their families to follow Jesus. Four verses - at least, that's the way that Mark describes it.

I know that I would want at least 48 hours to think through my decision, to weigh the consequences, to think about abandoning the family business, and the implications of the career move (or, at least a sabbatical). Of course, by the time I had done all that, Jesus would have moved on to the next town.

The author tells us nothing of the disciples' inner deliberation, whether they were successful fishermen, if they were religious people or not, if they got along with their father, or if they had a sense of wanderlust or adventure. Mark merely says, *"And immediately they left their nets and followed him."* Note that the word, "immediately," is the most common phrase in Mark's Gospel, occurring 33 times in only 16 chapters. Mark's Jesus is clearly on the move.

Truth be told, Jesus was doing his own "fishing" that day, and what he ended up with were not four desperate drifters with nothing to lose. Instead, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John probably were well-established businessmen, educated, in a culture where prosperity and family were everything. Following Jesus, then, was no small disruption of their lives but a complete change of course. Throwing out their nets to fish for people with Jesus meant throwing out their security, their reputations and their livelihoods.

As far as we can tell, the 12 persons Jesus called to be his companions were ordinary men. The gospels don't say yay or nay, but it seems unlikely that Jesus did background checks to determine their IQ levels, financial acumen, communication skills, criminal history or temple education. No, from all accounts Jesus picked people much like you and me in the midst of their daily work.

And as the gospels make abundantly clear, his disciples were anything but perfect. Many times they misunderstood him. They often hesitated to follow him. They fought

over who was the greatest, and played the blame game among themselves. Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him. And their lives didn't end very well either – crucifixion, stoning, beheading, imprisonment – you get the picture.

But this motley crew of 12 would be the persons who would continue Jesus' work on earth after he left - ordinary people, like you and me. They were called. This invitation to discipleship, to "fishing," is no less than a call to participate in Jesus' own mission. Instead of offering his disciples a place at his feet, Jesus offered them a place at his side, joining with him to proclaim the good news of the kingdom that is both present and yet-to-come. //

Martin Luther wrote and spoke often about the priesthood of all believers – his notion that while some are set apart by God to be pastors in the church, all the other baptized are also priests, with important responsibilities in God's kingdom.

Think about how Jesus frames his call to these fishermen: *"I will make you fish for people."* Jesus is telling them that he can take who they are and what they do and for God's kingdom. It might sound like the disciples dropped their nets and left their fishing vocation completely. But throughout the gospel story we hear about Jesus and the disciples getting into boats. Who else but fishermen would have boats? How else did they continue to support their ministry and feed their families? Fishermen fish, but now the disciples do it for a higher purpose.

So rather than trying to imagine that we are called to some life completely different from the one we live now, imagine that we are called to do what we already do in ways that show and enact God's kingdom. You're a fisherman, so fish for people. You're a singer or instrumentalist, so sing and play music for people. You're an investor, so invest for people. You push a broom or you push papers, so push away. You rescue, protect or care for people, so do that. Cooking, cleaning, teaching, driving, engineering, clothing, laughing, serving, caring for – all of these can be used to "fish" for people, or to cook or clean or teach or clothe or serve God's people. Regardless of what your work and your gifts are, they can be used for God and God's kingdom. It's all about being who we are and doing what we do for a higher purpose – for God's purpose. And we don't even have to tell people what we are doing. God knows.

The kingdom of God is about grace, love, justice and mercy for all people. Through the grace and gift of baptism, God has called us to follow Jesus in the way of the kingdom. So here is your question to ponder, your challenge: How can you do what you do already - be who you are - in ways that will help people to know God and to live life more fully?