

### 3 Epiphany Jan. 22, 2023

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit. Amen.**

How many of you have ever gone fishing? Raise your hand. Oh, good, we have some fishing experience here today. So, I have a question for you: Based on what you know about fishing, what would you say are some qualities that make someone a good fisherman?

My dad was an avid fisherman, and he often took me fishing with him because he said that I brought him good luck. So, as a little girl, I believed that I had a special power to attract fish to our boat. I was sort of a fish muse. And I thought my dad was very lucky to have me as his fishing partner.

There were several Sunday mornings each summer, when the pickerel were biting, that my Dad would announce to my mom that on this particular Sunday, he would be worshipping God sitting in his boat on the river, rather than sitting in his pew at church. My mom would give him a hard time about missing church. And he loved reminding her, "Lucille, the very first people Jesus asked to follow him were fishermen. And he spent a lot more time in boats with fishermen than he spent in church with the religious people, who gave him nothing but trouble." My dad was convinced that Jesus had a special place in his heart for fishermen.

I don't know about that, but it is true that Jesus' ministry is punctuated every here and there with a fishing story. Today in our gospel lesson, we heard the first fishing story where Jesus, the master of metaphors, calls his first disciples with those intriguing words, "**Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.**"

You and I are here today because somewhere along the way, we heard this same call. "**Follow me.**" We are the followers of Jesus in this time and place. And today we are reminded that as followers of Jesus, we are called to "*fish for people.*" But **what** does Jesus mean by that? **How** do we fish for people?

Jesus says that if we follow him, he will **make** us fishers of people. I guess this means he will show us how to do it. So, let's take a closer look at what Jesus does, and see what we can learn about the qualities that make someone good at *fishing for people*.

The first thing we notice is that Jesus meets people where they are. He goes to them. He doesn't expect the fishermen to get cleaned up and come to one of his talks at the synagogue. No. He goes down to the shore-the place where they live out their daily lives.

So, the first thing we learn from watching Jesus is that fishing for people does not necessarily take place in a church. Fishing for people takes place outside the walls of a church, in the ocean of our daily lives.

The second thing we notice is that Jesus takes the initiative to engage with people. He doesn't wait for people to talk to him. He calls out to Simon and Andrew. He calls out to James and John. He takes the lead. He reaches out. He invites them into a conversation.

And Jesus pays attention to who people are and what they do, so that when he strikes up a conversation with them, they can relate to what he was saying. In our lesson today he is reaching out to fisherman, so he uses a fishing metaphor. But, if he's talking to farmers, he talks about seeds and crops; With shepherds, he talks about wolves and lost sheep; With tax collectors, he talks about money; And with the religious leaders, he talks about scripture.

Jesus fishes for people by **getting to know** them, by **talking with them** about things that matter to them, by **cultivating relationships** with them.

So, the second thing we learn from watching Jesus is that fishing for people is all about relationships—being willing to enter into authentic relationships with people—sharing real life with them.

Fishing for people is not about getting them to believe certain things **about** God. It's about inviting them into a relationship **with** God. It's about bringing the presence of God into the lives of others through our presence in their lives. If God is alive in us as God was alive in Jesus, then we are conduits of God's presence, of God's grace. We are the carriers of God's love and compassion in the world today.

Third, there's an important detail we need to note when it comes to this "fishing for people" metaphor. In Jesus' day, they didn't fish with fishing lines. They fished with nets. That means that every sort of fish was gathered into the net—not just certain fish that met certain criteria.

For Jesus, there is no discriminating when it comes to fishing for people. Jesus gathers in every kind of person—

rich people and poor people,  
ordinary people and influential people,  
women and men,  
tax collectors and religious leaders,  
educated people and uneducated people,  
people who are celebrating and people who are suffering,  
and all the different sorts of marginalized people of his day—the lepers, the disabled, the hungry, the outcast, the prostitutes, the Samaritans. In fact, he gets a lot of flak from the religious leaders for associating with people who they did not consider "kosher."

So, the third thing we learn from watching Jesus is that "fishing for people" involves associating with and building relationships with all sorts of different people, not just people who are not like us.

One of my favorite professors at seminary used to say, “Whenever we draw a line between ourselves and someone else, Jesus is on the other side of the line.” So, if we are following Jesus, we have to cross over the lines we draw. Jesus gathers all people into the net of God’s love and, as his followers, we are called to do the same.

I don’t know about you, but I really need help when it comes to this kind of fishing. I might have been a fish muse when I was young, but I am not good at fishing for people who are different from me.

When I feel like I fundamentally disagree with someone in matters of faith or politics or values, I still draw a line. I don’t like to fish in those waters. And in other situations, when I am called to leave my comfort zone, my familiar fishing waters, I am hesitant and shy and anxious and awkward.

Let’s just take Dining With Dignity as an example. The first Tuesday of each month, we followers of Jesus at St. Cyprian’s have the opportunity to provide and share a meal with those in our community who are struggling with food insecurity and lack of housing. This is a perfect opportunity for us to follow Jesus and fish for people...to gather people into the net of God’s love by cultivating relationships with those who are living on the margins today, in our town, on our watch.

Jerry and I have been signing up on Linda’s lists to bring food for quite a while now. But this month was the first time we volunteered to help serve the food. And as I was having my meditation time the morning of the dinner, I heard that still small voice within saying, “So, tonight, spend some time getting to know the people who come to the dinner. Sit down with them at the tables and talk with them.” And my heart answered, “Yes. That is a great idea. That is what I’m going to do.” But here’s how it played out. I stood behind the serving table the entire night and the only thing I said to our dinner guests was “Would you like some collard greens?”

And herein lies the dilemma:

- Even though I know intellectually what we are called to do as followers of Jesus;
- Even though I know that if I draw a line, Jesus is on the other side saying, “Get over here!”
- Even though that still small voice of the Spirit often reminds me what I am called to do in a certain situation,
- And even though I want to do it, I don’t.

It’s like the apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, *“My own behavior baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I don’t want to do...I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power...Who will rescue me?”* (Romans 7:15 Philips Translation)

And Jesus responds, “I will.” “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Come with me and **I will make you**—transform you—into what God is calling you to be.

Jesus knows us. He knows we can't do this on our own. He knows we still draw lines. He knows we are each a work in progress. **And that is why Jesus promises to be with us always.** The Spirit of Christ is with us, working within us and among us to help us grow into who God created us to be, to help us accomplish what God is calling us to do, as individuals and as a congregation.

But here's the thing: I am about to turn 70, and I'm starting to feel like time is running out.

And that brings us to the last thing I want to mention about this story. Matthew tells us that Simon, Andrew, James and John **immediately** left their boats and followed Jesus! No drawing lines. No hesitation. No shyness. No anxiety. No awkwardness. They just immediately left their nets, their boats, their father and followed Jesus. Clearly, there is an **urgency** in this call. We don't have forever to do what we have been sent here to do.

This past Monday, Jerry and I attended the breakfast and Silent March commemorating the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The theme of the day was taken from Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech that he delivered in Washington DC in 1963. Listen to his words:

*"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the **fierce urgency of now**. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."*

The "fierce urgency of now." Today Jesus calls us to join him in fishing for people. We don't have forever to gather people into the net of God's love. And there is such a thing as being too late.

There is so much suffering and injustice in the world right now. There is no time to draw lines. There is no time to be hesitant or shy or anxious or awkward. *"This is the time for vigorous and positive action."*

In closing, I'd like to share the lyrics of a song written by the Scottish theologian and composer, John Bell. The song is called *The Summons*. I invite you to close your eyes if that makes it easier for you to listen.

*"Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"*

*"Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare, should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?"*

*“Will you love the you you hide if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around,  
Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?”*

*Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.  
In your company I’ll go where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me.*

Today, in the fierce urgency of now, Jesus calls each of us by name. May we be given the faith and courage to leave behind whatever is holding us back and immediately follow Jesus. Amen.