

Third Sunday of Epiphany – January 21, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

“To Fish or Not to Fish?”

I just love when the Gospels take us to the Sea of Galilee – it is without a doubt one of the most beautiful places that I have ever been in my life. I thought Bermuda was beautiful on our honeymoon. It doesn't even hold a candle to the Sea of Galilee. Jesus knew when He created the world that He was going to spend a lot of time there. It is just absolutely one of my favorite places on the face of the earth. It is on my heart that someday, Marilyn and I will lead another trip to Israel, and I do believe that many of you will be coming with us – but that is down the road – a couple of years from now. It would be a huge blessing for you to see where the Bible took place. Being able to look out at the sea and the crystal water, knowing that Jesus stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – which is known as the Sea or Lake of Tiberius, or the Lake of Gennesaret is beyond imagination. What is a Gennesaret? It means harp shaped, and if you look at a map of Israel you will see that the Sea of Galilee is indeed shaped like an ancient harp. It is certainly indescribable. Remarkably, it remains mostly unchanged to this day.

It is there that Jesus meets two sets of brothers – one who is very near and dear to our hearts - Andrew – who is what we are about. I asked some people the other night what did St. Andrew do? St. Andrew and John attended the baptism of Jesus and it was so powerful that he decided he had to introduce his brother Peter to Jesus. So the two sets of brothers were Andrew and Peter and then James and John. These four men are fishermen. Jesus tells them to leave everything and that they should come and follow Him, and He will make them “become *fishers of men!*” Several translations, including the NIV – which we use, omit the word become, simply saying “*I will make you fishers of men.*” The Greek verb **γίνομαι** (*ginomai*) means to come into being. This means that a transformation will take place, and as we learn through the Gospels, there would be a great transformation in their lives – a transformation from fishermen eventually to shepherds. There is a great difference between catching – and keeping – and that is the difference between a fisherman and a shepherd. That transformation would take the better part of three years to happen.

Jesus' words “*Follow me*” are not the invitation to be saved but the call to service. It is no small thing to give up everything to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus Christ is to set aside our own goals and pleasures and to grasp onto the purposes for which God created us. Those purposes are:

- To know Him in a personal way and
- To make disciples of others by teaching them all of Christ's commands.
- All those who truly follow Christ must exchange their affections, goals and priorities for His.

When Jesus “called” Peter and Andrew their goal in life was to be successful fishermen. In asking them to give up this goal, He asked them to follow Him and He would “make them become fishers for men's souls.” Jesus did not simply ask His disciples to become fishers of men but rather He promised to make them become fishers of men. Jesus would be their mentor, their coach, giving them a positive example to follow.

To follow Jesus is a call that requires complete and immediate detachment from everything else. Peter and Andrew “*left their nets*” suggesting that they walked away from their occupation. James and John “*left their father*” suggesting that following Christ takes precedence over even maintaining a close proximity to our family. The requirements for following Jesus are not the same for everyone.

- For some it means leaving their present occupations to follow him.
- For others it means being willing to leave family connections and being close to family. I know what both of these are like as we were transplanted from occupations and family – to serve Him in His church.
- For everyone it is a willingness to exchange their affections, goals and priorities for His.

Jesus expects a commitment. If you put your name down for something – do it! Don’t look for an excuse not to do it – because we are all very good at that - me included. When you make a commitment – follow it. These fishermen had moved from merely associating with Jesus to being in fellowship with Him. Jesus was calling Peter to catch people for the purpose of giving them the message of life – eternal life.

I want you to fast forward nearly three years – to John chapter 21. The Risen Jesus calls out to the Apostles and asks them if they have caught anything. A similar situation to the one in Luke 5 takes place but here Jesus tells them to set their net over the other side of the boat. (Gentile side of the boat – rather than Jewish side.) In fishing in the Sea of Galilee, a good Jewish Fisherman would point his boat north, and then let down his nets on the left side of the boat – the side of the lake where Capernaum was. This was considered the Jewish side of the boat, as opposed to the Gentile side, or right side facing the Gadarenes and the Decapolis. Jesus is expanding their horizons – and expanding their catch – the whole world and not just Israel. Right after this – after Jesus fed them once again – He reinstates Peter – and makes him not just a fisherman – but now – a shepherd asking him if he loves Him? Jesus then tells Peter to “*tend My lambs; shepherd My sheep; tend My sheep.*” (John 21:15,16,17) The transformation is complete.

As I said before - there is a great difference between catching – and keeping – and that is the difference between a fisherman and a shepherd.

We as Christians sometimes get the impression that we have got to do it all. How many of us imagine that God is waiting passively for us to initiate things? If we don’t organize it, it won’t get done and if we don’t tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ- they won’t hear it! And if we don’t change the world – it won’t get changed. There is the train of thought that we need to be His hands. Well, may I suggest to you that God doesn’t need our hands – after all – wasn’t it His hands that made that magnificent sunrise this morning?

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You know - God does not need us to do anything for Him. He is quite capable of creating a universe, with just a word, but He welcomes the efforts of those that He loves and honors and blesses those efforts – for they glorify Him. Jesus doesn't need the Apostles fish – but He invites them to bring their catch alongside. He asks them to work alongside Him. Unlike Luke 5, this time Jesus told them to go out and cast the net and He was not in the boat – their efforts brought in the catch that He designed for them. And so, it is in ministry – Jesus sends us out – to do the work He has given us to do – that He has designed for us to do - and He blesses us and guides us all the while.

- Yes, we are called to work hard for Him.
- Yes, we are supposed to be organized – and there is no excuse for laziness, sloppiness or halfhearted effort in God's Kingdom. If it is God's work that we are doing – then we must do it with all of our might – and strive to do excellence in the process.

You don't hear this every Sunday morning – but before the service – we gather in the sacristy and we pray. We ask God to raise us up and let us strive for excellence. We know we are going to fail – He knows we are going to fail – but we ask Him to cover it up - so nobody notices. WE ask Him to help up to strive for that.

That is what I believe this message is about. Jesus calls us to ministry in His Name – to come alongside Him and be taught and fed. You may have heard: “Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach that man to fish and he'll be fed for a lifetime”

So, what is the most important thing we can do as *Fishers of Men*, as Christians? Well, when we know that someone is dying – one of the first questions that runs through all of our minds is “Are they saved?” This should remind us of is what really matters in life is; what we are most concerned about at death – whether people know Jesus Christ. When someone is dying nothing else really matters, does it? I want to suggest to you that that question should be on our hearts long before our loved ones are preparing to leave this world – it should be a priority in our lives to make sure they know and love Jesus. That doesn't mean that you have to take the Bible and thump it in their faces – just show them the love of Christ. The presence – your presence in their lives!

There have been times in the life of every Christian when they recognized that the greatest thing they could do in this life was introduce someone else to Christ. We don't and can't do the saving, for only God can do that! We can be like Andrew who introduced his brother Peter to Jesus, and we can introduce our friends and family to Him as well.

Have you ever really stopped to realize that Jesus wants you to be someone whose heart is moved to reach out to the lost people around you? In order to accomplish this - would you be willing to

- Lay aside your personal ambition and plans to fully follow Christ? That doesn't mean that you need to get a collar or to go to seminary, or even to go on Wednesday night to the Bible study – but it will help. Not for me – but for you!

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- To better reflect the light of Christ to those around you in your words, your attitude, and your actions? Yes, even behind the wheel.
- Look for and take opportunities to share with others what Jesus has done for you.

Let us not forget the words of Jesus invitation: *“Follow me and I will make you become Fishers of Men.”*